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Pandora
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Science Fiction Science Fantasy Magazine

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HALL OF MIRRORS

It is a tough decision to make—whether to give up your life so you can live it over again!

For an instant you think it is temporary blindness, this sudden dark that comes in the middle of a bright afternoon.

It must be blindness, you think; could the sun that was tanning you have gone out instantaneously, leaving you in utter blackness?

Then the nerves of your body tell you that you are standing, whereas only a second ago you were sitting comfortably, almost reclining, in a canvas chair. In the patio of a friend's house in Beverly Hills. Talking to Barbara, your fiancée. Looking at Barbara—Barbara in a swim suit—her skin golden tan in the brilliant sunshine, beautiful.

You wore swimming trunks. Now you do not feel them on you; the slight pressure of the elastic waistband is no longer there against your waist. You touch your hands to your hips. You are naked. And standing.

Whatever has happened to you is more than a change to sudden darkness or to sudden blindness.

You raise your hands gropingly before you. They touch a plain smooth surface, a wall. You spread them apart and each hand reaches a corner. You pivot slowly. A second wall, then a third, then a door. You are in a closet about four feet square.

Your hand finds the knob of the door. It turns and you push the door open.

There is light now. The door has opened to a lighted room ... a room that you have never seen before.

It is not large, but it is pleasantly furnished—although the furniture is of a style that is strange to you. Modesty makes you open the door cautiously the rest of the way. But the room is empty of people.

You step into the room, turning to look behind you into the closet, which is now illuminated by light from the room. The closet is and is not a closet; it is the

size and shape of one, but it contains nothing, not a single hook, no rod for hanging clothes, no shelf. It is an empty, blank-walled, four-by-four-foot space.

You close the door to it and stand looking around the room. It is about twelve by sixteen feet. There is one door, but it is closed. There are no windows. Five pieces of furniture. Four of them you recognize—more or less. One looks like a very functional desk. One is obviously a chair ... a comfortable-looking one. There is a table, although its top is on several levels instead of only one. Another is a bed, or couch. Something shimmering is lying across it and you walk over and pick the shimmering something up and examine it. It is a garment.

You are naked, so you put it on. Slippers are part way under the bed (or couch) and you slide your feet into them. They fit, and they feel warm and comfortable as nothing you have ever worn on your feet has felt. Like lamb's wool, but softer.

You are dressed now. You look at the door—the only door of the room except that of the closet (closet?) from which you entered it. You walk to the door and before you try the knob, you see the small typewritten sign pasted just above it that reads:

This door has a time lock set to open in one hour. For reasons you will soon understand, it is better that you do not leave this room before then. There is a letter for you on the desk. Please read it.

It is not signed. You look at the desk and see that there is an envelope lying on it.

You do not yet go to take that envelope from the desk and read the letter that must be in it.

Why not? Because you are frightened.

You see other things about the room. The lighting has no source that you can discover. It comes from nowhere. It is not indirect lighting; the ceiling and the walls are not reflecting it at all.

They didn't have lighting like that, back where you came from. What did you mean by back where you came from?

You close your eyes. You tell yourself: I am Norman Hastings. I am an associate professor of mathematics at the University of Southern California. I am twenty-five years old, and this is the year nineteen hundred and fifty-four.

You open your eyes and look again.

They didn't use that style of furniture in Los Angeles—or anywhere else that you know of—in 1954. That thing over in the corner—you can't even guess what it is. So might your grandfather, at your age, have looked at a television set.

You look down at yourself, at the shimmering garment that you found waiting for you. With thumb and forefinger you feel its texture.

It's like nothing you've ever touched before.

I am Norman Hastings. This is nineteen hundred and fifty-four.

Suddenly you must know, and at once.

You go to the desk and pick up the envelope that lies upon it. Your name is typed on the outside: Norman Hastings.

Your hands shake a little as you open it. Do you blame them?

There are several pages, typewritten. Dear Norman, it starts. You turn quickly to the end to look for the signature. It is unsigned.

You turn back and start reading.

"Do not be afraid. There is nothing to fear, but much to explain. Much that you must understand before the time lock opens that door. Much that you must accept and—obey.

"You have already guessed that you are in the future—in what, to you, seems to be the future. The clothes and the room must have told you that. I planned it that way so the shock would not be too sudden, so you would realize it over the course of several minutes rather than read it here—and quite probably disbelieve what you read.

"The 'closet' from which you have just stepped is, as you have by now realized, a time machine. From it you stepped into the world of 2004. The date is April 7th, just fifty years from the time you last remember.

"You cannot return.

"I did this to you and you may hate me for it; I do not know. That is up to you to decide, but it does not matter. What does matter, and not to you alone, is another decision which you must make. I am incapable of making it.

"Who is writing this to you? I would rather not tell you just yet. By the time you have finished reading this, even though it is not signed (for I knew you would look first for a signature), I will not need to tell you who I am. You will know.

"I am seventy-five years of age. I have, in this year 2004, been studying 'time' for thirty of those years. I have completed the first time machine ever built—and thus far, its construction, even the fact that it has been constructed, is my own secret.

"You have just participated in the first major experiment. It will be your responsibility to decide whether there shall ever be any more experiments with it, whether it should be given to the world, or whether it should be destroyed and never used again."

End of the first page. You look up for a moment, hesitating to turn the next page. Already you suspect what is coming.

You turn the page.

"I constructed the first time machine a week ago. My calculations had told

me that it would work, but not how it would work. I had expected it to send an object back in time—it works backward in time only, not forward—physically unchanged and intact.

"My first experiment showed me my error. I placed a cube of metal in the machine—it was a miniature of the one you just walked out of—and set the machine to go backward ten years. I flicked the switch and opened the door, expecting to find the cube vanished. Instead I found it had crumbled to powder.

"I put in another cube and sent it two years back. The second cube came back unchanged, except that it was newer, shinier.

"That gave me the answer. I had been expecting the cubes to go back in time, and they had done so, but not in the sense I had expected them to. Those metal cubes had been fabricated about three years previously. I had sent the first one back years before it had existed in its fabricated form. Ten years ago it had been ore. The machine returned it to that state.

"Do you see how our previous theories of time travel have been wrong? We expected to be able to step into a time machine in, say, 2004, set it for fifty years back, and then step out in the year 1954 ... but it does not work that way. The machine does not move in time. Only whatever is within the machine is affected, and then just with relation to itself and not to the rest of the Universe.

"I confirmed this with guinea pigs by sending one six weeks old five weeks back and it came out a baby.

"I need not outline all my experiments here. You will find a record of them in the desk and you can study it later.

"Do you understand now what has happened to you, Norman?"

You begin to understand. And you begin to sweat.

The I who wrote that letter you are now reading is you, yourself at the age of seventy-five, in this year of 2004. You are that seventy-five-year-old man, with your body returned to what it had been fifty years ago, with all the memories of fifty years of living wiped out.

You invented the time machine.

And before you used it on yourself, you made these arrangements to help you orient yourself. You wrote yourself the letter which you are now reading.

But if those fifty years are—to you—gone, what of all your friends, those you loved? What of your parents? What of the girl you are going—were going—to marry?

You read on:

"Yes, you will want to know what has happened. Mom died in 1963, Dad in 1968. You married Barbara in 1956. I am sorry to tell you that she died only three years later, in a plane crash. You have one son. He is still living; his name is Walter;

he is now forty-six years old and is an accountant in Kansas City."

Tears come into your eyes and for a moment you can no longer read. Barbara dead—dead for forty-five years. And only minutes ago, in subjective time, you were sitting next to her, sitting in the bright sun in a Beverly Hills patio ...

You force yourself to read again.

"But back to the discovery. You begin to see some of its implications. You will need time to think to see all of them.

"It does not permit time travel as we have thought of time travel, but it gives us immortality of a sort. Immortality of the kind I have temporarily given us.

"Is it good? Is it worth while to lose the memory of fifty years of one's life in order to return one's body to relative youth? The only way I can find out is to try, as soon as I have finished writing this and made my other preparations.

"You will know the answer.

"But before you decide, remember that there is another problem, more important than the psychological one. I mean overpopulation.

"If our discovery is given to the world, if all who are old or dying can make themselves young again, the population will almost double every generation. Nor would the world—not even our own relatively enlightened country—be willing to accept compulsory birth control as a solution.

"Give this to the world, as the world is today in 2004, and within a generation there will be famine, suffering, war. Perhaps a complete collapse of civilization.

"Yes, we have reached other planets, but they are not suitable for colonizing. The stars may be our answer, but we are a long way from reaching them. When we do, someday, the billions of habitable planets that must be out there will be our answer ... our living room. But until then, what is the answer?

"Destroy the machine? But think of the countless lives it can save, the suffering it can prevent. Think of what it would mean to a man dying of cancer. Think ..."

Think. You finish the letter and put it down.

You think of Barbara dead for forty-five years. And of the fact that you were married to her for three years and that those years are lost to you.

Fifty years lost. You damn the old man of seventy-five whom you became and who has done this to you ... who has given you this decision to make.

Bitterly, you know what the decision must be. You think that he knew, too, and realize that he could safely leave it in your hands. Damn him, he should have known.

Too valuable to destroy, too dangerous to give.

The other answer is painfully obvious.

You must be custodian of this discovery and keep it secret until it is safe to

give, until mankind has expanded to the stars and has new worlds to populate, or until, even without that, he has reached a state of civilization where he can avoid overpopulation by rationing births to the number of accidental—or voluntary—deaths.

If neither of those things has happened in another fifty years (and are they likely so soon?), then you, at seventy-five, will be writing another letter like this one. You will be undergoing another experience similar to the one you're going through now. And making the same decision, of course.

Why not? You'll be the same person again.

Time and again, to preserve this secret until Man is ready for it.

How often will you again sit at a desk like this one, thinking the thoughts you are thinking now, feeling the grief you now feel?

There is a click at the door and you know that the time lock has opened, that you are now free to leave this room, free to start a new life for yourself in place of the one you have already lived and lost.

But you are in no hurry now to walk directly through that door.

You sit there, staring straight ahead of you blindly, seeing in your mind's eye the vista of a set of facing mirrors, like those in an old-fashioned barber shop, reflecting the same thing over and over again, diminishing into far distance.

HE WALKED AROUND THE HORSES

This tale is based on an authenticated, documented fact. A man vanished—right out of this world. And where he went—

In November 1809, an Englishman named Benjamin Bathurst vanished, inexplicably and utterly.

He was en route to Hamburg from Vienna, where he had been serving as his government's envoy to the court of what Napoleon had left of the Austrian Empire. At an inn in Perleburg, in Prussia, while examining a change of horses for his coach, he casually stepped out of sight of his secretary and his valet. He was not seen to leave the inn yard. He was not seen again, ever.

At least, not in this continuum....

(From Baron Eugen von Krutz, Minister of Police, to His Excellency the Count von Berchtenwald, Chancellor to His Majesty Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia.)

25 November, 1809

Your Excellency:

A circumstance has come to the notice of this Ministry, the significance of which I am at a loss to define, but, since it appears to involve matters of State, both here and abroad, I am convinced that it is of sufficient importance to be brought to your personal attention. Frankly, I am unwilling to take any further action in the matter without your advice.

Briefly, the situation is this: We are holding, here at the Ministry of Police, a person giving his name as Benjamin Bathurst, who claims to be a British diplomat. This person was taken into custody by the police at Perleburg yesterday, as a result of a disturbance at an inn there; he is being detained on technical charges of causing disorder in a public place, and of being a suspicious person. When arrested, he had in his possession a dispatch case, containing a number of papers; these are of such an extraordinary nature that the local authorities declined to assume any responsibility beyond having the man sent here to Berlin.

After interviewing this person and examining his papers, I am, I must con-

fess, in much the same position. This is not, I am convinced, any ordinary police matter; there is something very strange and disturbing here. The man's statements, taken alone, are so incredible as to justify the assumption that he is mad. I cannot, however, adopt this theory, in view of his demeanor, which is that of a man of perfect rationality, and because of the existence of these papers. The whole thing is mad; incomprehensible!

The papers in question accompany, along with copies of the various statements taken at Perleburg, a personal letter to me from my nephew, Lieutenant Rudolf von Tarlburg. This last is deserving of your particular attention; Lieutenant von Tarlburg is a very level-headed young officer, not at all inclined to be fanciful or imaginative. It would take a good deal to affect him as he describes.

The man calling himself Benjamin Bathurst is now lodged in an apartment here at the Ministry; he is being treated with every consideration, and, except for freedom of movement, accorded every privilege.

I am, most anxiously awaiting your advice, et cetera, et cetera,

Krutz

(Report of Traugott Zeller, *Oberwachtmeister, Staatspolizei*, made at Perleburg, 25 November, 1809.)

At about ten minutes past two of the afternoon of Saturday, 25 November, while I was at the police station, there entered a man known to me as Franz Bauer, an inn servant employed by Christian Hauck, at the sign of the Sword & Scepter, here in Perleburg. This man Franz Bauer made complaint to Staatspolizeikapitan Ernst Hartenstein, saying that there was a madman making trouble at the inn where he, Franz Bauer, worked. I was, therefore, directed, by Staatspolizeikapitan Hartenstein, to go to the Sword & Scepter Inn, there to act at discretion to maintain the peace.

Arriving at the inn in company with the said Franz Bauer, I found a considerable crowd of people in the common room, and, in the midst of them, the innkeeper, Christian Hauck, in altercation with a stranger. This stranger was a gentlemanly-appearing person, dressed in traveling clothes, who had under his arm a small leather dispatch case. As I entered, I could hear him, speaking in German with a strong English accent, abusing the innkeeper, the said Christian Hauck, and accusing him of having drugged his, the stranger's, wine, and of having stolen his, the stranger's, coach-and-four, and of having abducted his, the stranger's, secretary and servants. This the said Christian Hauck was loudly denying, and the other people in the inn were taking the innkeeper's part, and mocking the stranger for a madman.

On entering, I commanded everyone to be silent, in the king's name, and then, as he appeared to be the complaining party of the dispute, I required the foreign gentleman to state to me what was the trouble. He then repeated his accu-

sations against the innkeeper, Hauck, saying that Hauck, or, rather, another man who resembled Hauck and who had claimed to be the innkeeper, had drugged his wine and stolen his coach and made off with his secretary and his servants. At this point, the innkeeper and the bystanders all began shouting denials and contradictions, so that I had to pound on a table with my truncheon to command silence.

I then required the innkeeper, Christian Hauck, to answer the charges which the stranger had made; this he did with a complete denial of all of them, saying that the stranger had had no wine in his inn, and that he had not been inside the inn until a few minutes before, when he had burst in shouting accusations, and that there had been no secretary, and no valet, and no coachman, and no coach-and-four, at the inn, and that the gentleman was raving mad. To all this, he called the people who were in the common room to witness.

I then required the stranger to account for himself. He said that his name was Benjamin Bathurst, and that he was a British diplomat, returning to England from Vienna. To prove this, he produced from his dispatch case sundry papers. One of these was a letter of safe-conduct, issued by the Prussian Chancellery, in which he was named and described as Benjamin Bathurst. The other papers were English, all bearing seals, and appearing to be official documents.

Accordingly, I requested him to accompany me to the police station, and also the innkeeper, and three men whom the innkeeper wanted to bring as witnesses.

Traugott Zeller *Oberwachtmeister*

Report approved,

Ernst Hartenstein *Staatspolizeikapitan*

(Statement of the self-so-called Benjamin Bathurst, taken at the police station at Perleburg, 25 November, 1809.)

My name is Benjamin Bathurst, and I am Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the government of His Britannic Majesty to the court of His Majesty Franz I, Emperor of Austria, or, at least, I was until the events following the Austrian surrender made necessary my return to London. I left Vienna on the morning of Monday, the 20th, to go to Hamburg to take ship home; I was traveling in my own coach-and-four, with my secretary, Mr. Bertram Jardine, and my valet, William Small, both British subjects, and a coachman, Josef Bidek, an Austrian subject, whom I had hired for the trip. Because of the presence of French troops, whom I was anxious to avoid, I was forced to make a detour west as far as Salzburg before turning north toward Magdeburg, where I crossed the Elbe. I was unable to get a change of horses for my coach after leaving Gera, until I reached Perleburg, where I stopped at the Sword & Scepter Inn.

Arriving there, I left my coach in the inn yard, and I and my secretary, Mr.

Jardine, went into the inn. A man, not this fellow here, but another rogue, with more beard and less paunch, and more shabbily dressed, but as like him as though he were his brother, represented himself as the innkeeper, and I dealt with him for a change of horses, and ordered a bottle of wine for myself and my secretary, and also a pot of beer apiece for my valet and the coachman, to be taken outside to them. Then Jardine and I sat down to our wine, at a table in the common room, until the man who claimed to be the innkeeper came back and told us that the fresh horses were harnessed to the coach and ready to go. Then we went outside again.

I looked at the two horses on the off side, and then walked around in front of the team to look at the two nigh-side horses, and as I did I felt giddy, as though I were about to fall, and everything went black before my eyes. I thought I was having a fainting spell, something I am not at all subject to, and I put out my hand to grasp the hitching bar, but could not find it. I am sure, now, that I was unconscious for some time, because when my head cleared, the coach and horses were gone, and in their place was a big farm wagon, jacked up in front, with the right front wheel off, and two peasants were greasing the detached wheel.

I looked at them for a moment, unable to credit my eyes, and then I spoke to them in German, saying, "Where the devil's my coach-and-four?"

They both straightened, startled: the one who was holding the wheel almost dropped it.

"Pardon, excellency," he said, "there's been no coach-and-four here, all the time we've been here."

"Yes," said his mate, "and we've been here since just after noon."

I did not attempt to argue with them. It occurred to me—and it is still my opinion—that I was the victim of some plot; that my wine had been drugged, that I had been unconscious for some time, during which my coach had been removed and this wagon substituted for it, and that these peasants had been put to work on it and instructed what to say if questioned. If my arrival at the inn had been anticipated, and everything put in readiness, the whole business would not have taken ten minutes.

I therefore entered the inn, determined to have it out with this rascally innkeeper, but when I returned to the common room, he was nowhere to be seen, and this other fellow, who has given his name as Christian Hauck, claimed to be the innkeeper and denied knowledge of any of the things I have just stated. Furthermore, there were four cavalrymen, Uhlans, drinking beer and playing cards at the table where Jardine and I had had our wine, and they claimed to have been there for several hours.

I have no idea why such an elaborate prank, involving the participation of many people, should be played on me, except at the instigation of the French. In

that case, I cannot understand why Prussian soldiers should lend themselves to it.

Benjamin Bathurst

(Statement of Christian Hauck, innkeeper, taken at the police station at Perleburg, 25 November, 1809.)

May it please your honor, my name is Christian Hauck, and I keep an inn at the sign of the Sword & Scepter, and have these past fifteen years, and my father, and his father, before me, for the past fifty years, and never has there been a complaint like this against my inn. Your honor, it is a hard thing for a man who keeps a decent house, and pays his taxes, and obeys the laws, to be accused of crimes of this sort.

I know nothing of this gentleman, nor of his coach, nor his secretary, nor his servants; I never set eyes on him before he came bursting into the inn from the yard, shouting and raving like a madman, and crying out, "Where the devil's that rogue of an innkeeper?"

I said to him, "I am the innkeeper; what cause have you to call me a rogue, sir?"

The stranger replied:

"You're not the innkeeper I did business with a few minutes ago, and he's the rascal I want to see. I want to know what the devil's been done with my coach, and what's happened to my secretary and my servants."

I tried to tell him that I knew nothing of what he was talking about, but he would not listen, and gave me the lie, saying that he had been drugged and robbed, and his people kidnaped. He even had the impudence to claim that he and his secretary had been sitting at a table in that room, drinking wine, not fifteen minutes before, when there had been four noncommissioned officers of the Third Uhlans at that table since noon. Everybody in the room spoke up for me, but he would not listen, and was shouting that we were all robbers, and kidnapers, and French spies, and I don't know what all, when the police came.

Your honor, the man is mad. What I have told you about this is the truth, and all that I know about this business, so help me God.

Christian Hauck

(Statement of Franz Bauer, inn servant, taken at the police station at Perleburg, 25 November, 1809.)

May it please your honor, my name is Franz Bauer, and I am a servant at the Sword & Scepter Inn, kept by Christian Hauck.

This afternoon, when I went into the inn yard to empty a bucket of slops on the dung heap by the stables, I heard voices and turned around, to see this gentleman speaking to Wilhelm Beick and Fritz Herzer, who were greasing their wagon in the yard. He had not been in the yard when I had turned away to empty the

bucket, and I thought that he must have come in from the street. This gentleman was asking Beick and Herzer where was his coach, and when they told him they didn't know, he turned and ran into the inn.

Of my own knowledge, the man had not been inside the inn before then, nor had there been any coach, or any of the people he spoke of, at the inn, and none of the things he spoke of happened there, for otherwise I would know, since I was at the inn all day.

When I went back inside, I found him in the common room shouting at my master, and claiming that he had been drugged and robbed. I saw that he was mad and was afraid that he would do some mischief, so I went for the police.

Franz Bauer his (x) mark

(Statements of Wilhelm Beick and Fritz Herzer, peasants, taken at the police station at Perleburg, 25 November, 1809.)

May it please your honor, my name is Wilhelm Beick, and I am a tenant on the estate of the Baron von Hentig. On this day, I and Fritz Herzer were sent into Perleburg with a load of potatoes and cabbages which the innkeeper at the Sword & Scepter had bought from the estate superintendent. After we had unloaded them, we decided to grease our wagon, which was very dry, before going back, so we unhitched and began working on it. We took about two hours, starting just after we had eaten lunch, and in all that time, there was no coach-and-four in the inn yard. We were just finishing when this gentleman spoke to us, demanding to know where his coach was. We told him that there had been no coach in the yard all the time we had been there, so he turned around and ran into the inn. At the time, I thought that he had come out of the inn before speaking to us, for I know that he could not have come in from the street. Now I do not know where he came from, but I know that I never saw him before that moment.

Wilhelm Beick his (x) mark

I have heard the above testimony, and it is true to my own knowledge, and I have nothing to add to it.

Fritz Herzer his (x) mark

(From *Staatspolizeikapitan* Ernst Hartenstein, to His Excellency, the Baron von Krutz, Minister of Police.)

25 November, 1809

Your Excellency:

The accompanying copies of statements taken this day will explain how the prisoner, the self-so-called Benjamin Bathurst, came into my custody. I have charged him with causing disorder and being a suspicious person, to hold him until more can be learned about him. However, as he represents himself to be a British diplomat, I am unwilling to assume any further responsibility, and am hav-

ing him sent to your excellency, in Berlin.

In the first place, your excellency, I have the strongest doubts of the man's story. The statement which he made before me, and signed, is bad enough, with a coach-and-four turning into a farm wagon, like Cinderella's coach into a pumpkin, and three people vanishing as though swallowed by the earth. But all this is perfectly reasonable and credible, beside the things he said to me, of which no record was made.

Your excellency will have noticed, in his statement, certain allusions to the Austrian surrender, and to French troops in Austria. After his statement had been taken down, I noticed these allusions, and I inquired, what surrender, and what were French troops doing in Austria. The man looked at me in a pitying manner, and said:

"News seems to travel slowly, hereabouts; peace was concluded at Vienna on the 14th of last month. And as for what French troops are doing in Austria, they're doing the same things Bonaparte's brigands are doing everywhere in Europe."

"And who is Bonaparte?" I asked.

He stared at me as though I had asked him, "Who is the Lord Jehovah?" Then, after a moment, a look of comprehension came into his face.

"So, you Prussians concede him the title of Emperor, and refer to him as Napoleon," he said. "Well, I can assure you that His Britannic Majesty's government haven't done so, and never will; not so long as one Englishman has a finger left to pull a trigger. General Bonaparte is a usurper; His Britannic Majesty's government do not recognize any sovereignty in France except the House of Bourbon." This he said very sternly, as though rebuking me.

It took me a moment or so to digest that, and to appreciate all its implications. Why, this fellow evidently believed, as a matter of fact, that the French Monarchy had been overthrown by some military adventurer named Bonaparte, who was calling himself the Emperor Napoleon, and who had made war on Austria and forced a surrender. I made no attempt to argue with him—one wastes time arguing with madmen—but if this man could believe that, the transformation of a coach-and-four into a cabbage wagon was a small matter indeed. So, to humor him, I asked him if he thought General Bonaparte's agents were responsible for his trouble at the inn.

"Certainly," he replied. "The chances are they didn't know me to see me, and took Jardine for the minister, and me for the secretary, so they made off with poor Jardine. I wonder, though, that they left me my dispatch case. And that reminds me; I'll want that back. Diplomatic papers, you know."

I told him, very seriously, that we would have to check his credentials. I promised him I would make every effort to locate his secretary and his servants and his coach, took a complete description of all of them, and persuaded him to

go into an upstairs room, where I kept him under guard. I did start inquiries, calling in all my informers and spies, but, as I expected, I could learn nothing. I could not find anybody, even, who had seen him anywhere in Perleburg before he appeared at the Sword & Scepter, and that rather surprised me, as somebody should have seen him enter the town, or walk along the street.

In this connection, let me remind your excellency of the discrepancy in the statements of the servant, Franz Bauer, and of the two peasants. The former is certain the man entered the inn yard from the street; the latter are just as positive that he did not. Your excellency, I do not like such puzzles, for I am sure that all three were telling the truth to the best of their knowledge. They are ignorant common folk, I admit, but they should know what they did or did not see.

After I got the prisoner into safekeeping, I fell to examining his papers, and I can assure your excellency that they gave me a shock. I had paid little heed to his ravings about the King of France being dethroned, or about this General Bonaparte who called himself the Emperor Napoleon, but I found all these things mentioned in his papers and dispatches, which had every appearance of being official documents. There was repeated mention of the taking, by the French, of Vienna, last May, and of the capitulation of the Austrian Emperor to this General Bonaparte, and of battles being fought all over Europe, and I don't know what other fantastic things. Your excellency, I have heard of all sorts of madmen—one believing himself to be the Archangel Gabriel, or Mohammed, or a werewolf, and another convinced that his bones are made of glass, or that he is pursued and tormented by devils—but so help me God, this is the first time I have heard of a madman who had documentary proof for his delusions! Does your excellency wonder, then, that I want no part of this business?

But the matter of his credentials was even worse. He had papers, sealed with the seal of the British Foreign Office, and to every appearance genuine—but they were signed, as Foreign Minister, by one George Canning, and all the world knows that Lord Castlereagh has been Foreign Minister these last five years. And to cap it all, he had a safe-conduct, sealed with the seal of the Prussian Chancellery—the very seal, for I compared it, under a strong magnifying glass, with one that I knew to be genuine, and they were identical!—and yet, this letter was signed, as Chancellor, not by Count von Berchtenwald, but by Baron Stein, the Minister of Agriculture, and the signature, as far as I could see, appeared to be genuine! This is too much for me, your excellency; I must ask to be excused from dealing with this matter, before I become as mad as my prisoner!

I made arrangements, accordingly, with Colonel Keitel, of the Third Uhlans, to furnish an officer to escort this man into Berlin. The coach in which they come belongs to this police station, and the driver is one of my men. He should be furnished expense money to get back to Perleburg. The guard is a corporal of Uhlans,

the orderly of the officer. He will stay with the *Herr Oberleutnant*, and both of them will return here at their own convenience and expense.

I have the honor, your excellency, to be, et cetera, et cetera.

Ernst Hartenstein *Staatspolizeikapitan*

(From *Oberleutnant* Rudolf von Tarlburg, to Baron Eugen von Krutz.)

26 November, 1809

Dear Uncle Eugen;

This is in no sense a formal report; I made that at the Ministry, when I turned the Englishman and his papers over to one of your officers—a fellow with red hair and a face like a bulldog. But there are a few things which you should be told, which wouldn't look well in an official report, to let you know just what sort of a rare fish has got into your net.

I had just come in from drilling my platoon, yesterday, when Colonel Keitel's orderly told me that the colonel wanted to see me in his quarters. I found the old fellow in undress in his sitting room, smoking his big pipe.

"Come in, lieutenant; come in and sit down, my boy!" he greeted me, in that bluff, hearty manner which he always adopts with his junior officers when he has some particularly nasty job to be done. "How would you like to take a little trip in to Berlin? I have an errand, which won't take half an hour, and you can stay as long as you like, just so you're back by Thursday, when your turn comes up for road patrol."

Well, I thought, this is the bait. I waited to see what the hook would look like, saying that it was entirely agreeable with me, and asking what his errand was.

"Well, it isn't for myself, Tarlburg," he said. "It's for this fellow Hartenstein, the *Staatspolizeikapitan* here. He has something he wants done at the Ministry of Police, and I thought of you because I've heard you're related to the Baron von Krutz. You are, aren't you?" he asked, just as though he didn't know all about who all his officers are related to.

"That's right, colonel; the baron is my uncle," I said. "What does Hartenstein want done?"

"Why, he has a prisoner whom he wants taken to Berlin and turned over at the Ministry. All you have to do is to take him in, in a coach, and see he doesn't escape on the way, and get a receipt for him, and for some papers. This is a very important prisoner; I don't think Hartenstein has anybody he can trust to handle him. The prisoner claims to be some sort of a British diplomat, and for all Hartenstein knows, maybe he is. Also, he is a madman."

"A madman?" I echoed.

"Yes, just so. At least, that's what Hartenstein told me. I wanted to know

what sort of a madman—there are various kinds of madmen, all of whom must be handled differently—but all Hartenstein would tell me was that he had unrealistic beliefs about the state of affairs in Europe."

"Ha! What diplomat hasn't?" I asked.

Old Keitel gave a laugh, somewhere between the bark of a dog and the croaking of a raven.

"Yes, exactly! The unrealistic beliefs of diplomats are what soldiers die of," he said. "I said as much to Hartenstein, but he wouldn't tell me anything more. He seemed to regret having said even that much. He looked like a man who's seen a particularly terrifying ghost." The old man puffed hard at his famous pipe for a while, blowing smoke through his mustache. "Rudi, Hartenstein has pulled a hot potato out of the ashes, this time, and he wants to toss it to your uncle, before he burns his fingers. I think that's one reason why he got me to furnish an escort for his Englishman. Now, look; you must take this unrealistic diplomat, or this undiplomatic madman, or whatever in blazes he is, in to Berlin. And understand this." He pointed his pipe at me as though it were a pistol. "Your orders are to take him there and turn him over at the Ministry of Police. Nothing has been said about whether you turn him over alive, or dead, or half one and half the other. I know nothing about this business, and want to know nothing; if Hartenstein wants us to play goal warders for him, then he must be satisfied with our way of doing it!"

Well, to cut short the story, I looked at the coach Hartenstein had placed at my disposal, and I decided to chain the left door shut on the outside, so that it couldn't be opened from within. Then, I would put my prisoner on my left, so that the only way out would be past me. I decided not to carry any weapons which he might be able to snatch from me, so I took off my saber and locked it in the seat box, along with the dispatch case containing the Englishman's papers. It was cold enough to wear a greatcoat in comfort, so I wore mine, and in the right side pocket, where my prisoner couldn't reach, I put a little leaded bludgeon, and also a brace of pocket pistols. Hartenstein was going to furnish me a guard as well as a driver, but I said that I would take a servant, who could act as guard. The servant, of course, was my orderly, old Johann; I gave him my double hunting gun to carry, with a big charge of boar shot in one barrel and an ounce ball in the other.

In addition, I armed myself with a big bottle of cognac. I thought that if I could shoot my prisoner often enough with that, he would give me no trouble.

As it happened, he didn't, and none of my precautions—except the cognac—were needed. The man didn't look like a lunatic to me. He was a rather stout gentleman, of past middle age, with a ruddy complexion and an intelligent face. The only unusual thing about him was his hat, which was a peculiar contraption, looking like a pot. I put him in the carriage, and then offered him a drink out of my bottle, taking one about half as big myself. He smacked his lips over it and said,

"Well, that's real brandy; whatever we think of their detestable politics, we can't criticize the French for their liquor." Then, he said, "I'm glad they're sending me in the custody of a military gentleman, instead of a confounded gendarme. Tell me the truth, lieutenant; am I under arrest for anything?"

"Why," I said, "Captain Hartenstein should have told you about that. All I know is that I have orders to take you to the Ministry of Police, in Berlin, and not to let you escape on the way. These orders I will carry out; I hope you don't hold that against me."

He assured me that he did not, and we had another drink on it—I made sure, again, that he got twice as much as I did—and then the coachman cracked his whip and we were off for Berlin.

Now, I thought, I am going to see just what sort of a madman this is, and why Hartenstein is making a State affair out of a squabble at an inn. So I decided to explore his unrealistic beliefs about the state of affairs in Europe.

After guiding the conversation to where I wanted it, I asked him:

"What, Herr Bathurst, in your belief, is the real, underlying cause of the present tragic situation in Europe?"

That, I thought, was safe enough. Name me one year, since the days of Julius Caesar, when the situation in Europe hasn't been tragic! And it worked, to perfection.

"In my belief," says this Englishman, "the whole mess is the result of the victory of the rebellious colonists in North America, and their blasted republic."

Well, you can imagine, that gave me a start. All the world knows that the American Patriots lost their war for independence from England; that their army was shattered, that their leaders were either killed or driven into exile. How many times, when I was a little boy, did I not sit up long past my bedtime, when old Baron von Steuben was a guest at Tarlburg-Schloss, listening open-mouthed and wide-eyed to his stories of that gallant lost struggle! How I used to shiver at his tales of the terrible winter camp, or thrill at the battles, or weep as he told how he held the dying Washington in his arms, and listened to his noble last words, at the Battle of Doylestown! And here, this man was telling me that the Patriots had really won, and set up the republic for which they had fought! I had been prepared for some of what Hartenstein had called unrealistic beliefs, but nothing as fantastic as this.

"I can cut it even finer than that," Bathurst continued. "It was the defeat of Burgoyne at Saratoga. We made a good bargain when we got Benedict Arnold to turn his coat, but we didn't do it soon enough. If he hadn't been on the field that day, Burgoyne would have gone through Gates' army like a hot knife through butter."

But Arnold hadn't been at Saratoga. I know; I have read much of the Ameri-

can War. Arnold was shot dead on New Year's Day of 1776, during the storming of Quebec. And Burgoyne had done just as Bathurst had said; he had gone through Gates like a knife, and down the Hudson to join Howe.

"But, Herr Bathurst," I asked, "how could that affect the situation in Europe? America is thousands of miles away, across the ocean."

"Ideas can cross oceans quicker than armies. When Louis XVI decided to come to the aid of the Americans, he doomed himself and his regime. A successful resistance to royal authority in America was all the French Republicans needed to inspire them. Of course, we have Louis's own weakness to blame, too. If he'd given those rascals a whiff of grapeshot, when the mob tried to storm Versailles in 1790, there'd have been no French Revolution."

But he had. When Louis XVI ordered the howitzers turned on the mob at Versailles, and then sent the dragoons to ride down the survivors, the Republican movement had been broken. That had been when Cardinal Talleyrand, who was then merely Bishop of Autun, had came to the fore and become the power that he is today in France; the greatest King's Minister since Richelieu.

"And, after that, Louis's death followed as surely as night after day," Bathurst was saying. "And because the French had no experience in self-government, their republic was foredoomed. If Bonaparte hadn't seized power, somebody else would have; when the French murdered their king, they delivered themselves to dictatorship. And a dictator, unsupported by the prestige of royalty, has no choice but to lead his people into foreign war, to keep them from turning upon him."

It was like that all the way to Berlin. All these things seem foolish, by daylight, but as I sat in the darkness of that swaying coach, I was almost convinced of the reality of what he told me. I tell you, Uncle Eugen, it was frightening, as though he were giving me a view of Hell. *Gott im Himmel,* the things that man talked of! Armies swarming over Europe; sack and massacre, and cities burning; blockades, and starvation; kings deposed, and thrones tumbling like tenpins; battles in which the soldiers of every nation fought, and in which tens of thousands were mowed down like ripe grain; and, over all, the Satanic figure of a little man in a gray coat, who dictated peace to the Austrian Emperor in Schoenbrunn, and carried the Pope away a prisoner to Savona.

Madman, eh? Unrealistic beliefs, says Hartenstein? Well, give me madmen who drool spittle, and foam at the mouth, and shriek obscene blasphemies. But not this pleasant-seeming gentleman who sat beside me and talked of horrors in a quiet, cultured voice, while he drank my cognac.

But not all my cognac! If your man at the Ministry—the one with red hair and the bulldog face—tells you that I was drunk when I brought in that Englishman, you had better believe him!

Rudi.

(From Count von Berchtenwald, to the British Minister.)

28 November, 1809

Honored Sir:

The accompanying dossier will acquaint you with the problem confronting this Chancellery, without needless repetition on my part. Please to understand that it is not, and never was, any part of the intentions of the government of His Majesty Friedrich Wilhelm III to offer any injury or indignity to the government of His Britannic Majesty George III. We would never contemplate holding in arrest the person, or tampering with the papers, of an accredited envoy of your government. However, we have the gravest doubt, to make a considerable understatement, that this person who calls himself Benjamin Bathurst is any such envoy, and we do not think that it would be any service to the government of His Britannic Majesty to allow an impostor to travel about Europe in the guise of a British diplomatic representative. We certainly should not thank the government of His Britannic Majesty for failing to take steps to deal with some person who, in England, might falsely represent himself to be a Prussian diplomat.

This affair touches us as closely as it does your own government; this man had in his possession a letter of safe-conduct, which you will find in the accompanying dispatch case. It is of the regular form, as issued by this Chancellery, and is sealed with the Chancellery seal, or with a very exact counterfeit of it. However, it has been signed, as Chancellor of Prussia, with a signature indistinguishable from that of the Baron Stein, who is the present Prussian Minister of Agriculture. Baron Stein was shown the signature, with the rest of the letter covered, and without hesitation acknowledged it for his own writing. However, when the letter was uncovered and shown to him, his surprise and horror were such as would require the pen of a Goethe or a Schiller to describe, and he denied categorically ever having seen the document before.

I have no choice but to believe him. It is impossible to think that a man of Baron Stein's honorable and serious character would be party to the fabrication of a paper of this sort. Even aside from this, I am in the thing as deeply as he; if it is signed with his signature, it is also sealed with my seal, which has not been out of my personal keeping in the ten years that I have been Chancellor here. In fact, the word "impossible" can be used to describe the entire business. It was impossible for the man Benjamin Bathurst to have entered the inn yard—yet he did. It was impossible that he should carry papers of the sort found in his dispatch case, or that such papers should exist—yet I am sending them to you with this letter. It is impossible that Baron von Stein should sign a paper of the sort he did, or that it should be sealed by the Chancellery—yet it bears both Stein's signature and my seal.

You will also find in the dispatch case other credentials, ostensibly originat-

ing with the British Foreign Office, of the same character, being signed by persons having no connection with the Foreign Office, or even with the government, but being sealed with apparently authentic seals. If you send these papers to London, I fancy you will find that they will there create the same situation as that caused here by this letter of safe-conduct.

I am also sending you a charcoal sketch of the person who calls himself Benjamin Bathurst. This portrait was taken without its subject's knowledge. Baron von Krutz's nephew, Lieutenant von Tarlburg, who is the son of our mutual friend Count von Tarlburg, has a little friend, a very clever young lady who is, as you will see, an expert at this sort of work: she was introduced into a room at the Ministry of Police and placed behind a screen, where she could sketch our prisoner's face. If you should send this picture to London, I think that there is a good chance that it might be recognized. I can vouch that it is an excellent likeness.

To tell the truth, we are at our wits' end about this affair. I cannot understand how such excellent imitations of these various seals could be made, and the signature of the Baron von Stein is the most expert forgery that I have ever seen, in thirty years' experience as a statesman. This would indicate careful and painstaking work on the part of somebody; how, then, do we reconcile this with such clumsy mistakes, recognizable as such by any schoolboy, as signing the name of Baron Stein as Prussian Chancellor, or Mr. George Canning, who is a member of the opposition party and not connected with your government, as British Foreign secretary.

These are mistakes which only a madman would make. There are those who think our prisoner is mad, because of his apparent delusions about the great conqueror, General Bonaparte, alias the Emperor Napoleon. Madmen have been known to fabricate evidence to support their delusions, it is true, but I shudder to think of a madman having at his disposal the resources to manufacture the papers you will find in this dispatch case. Moreover, some of our foremost medical men, who have specialized in the disorders of the mind, have interviewed this man Bathurst and say that, save for his fixed belief in a nonexistent situation, he is perfectly sane.

Personally, I believe that the whole thing is a gigantic hoax, perpetrated for some hidden and sinister purpose, possibly to create confusion, and to undermine the confidence existing between your government and mine, and to set against one another various persons connected with both governments, or else as a mask for some other conspiratorial activity. Only a few months ago, you will recall, there was a Jacobin plot unmasked at Koeln.

But, whatever this business may portend, I do not like it. I want to get to the bottom of it as soon as possible, and I will thank you, my dear sir, and your government, for any assistance you may find possible.

I have the honor, sir, to be, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera,

Berchtenwald

FROM BARON VON KRUTZ, TO THE COUNT VON BERCHTENWALD. MOST URGENT; MOST IMPORTANT. TO BE DELIVERED IMMEDIATELY AND IN PERSON REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

28 November, 1809

Count von Berchtenwald:

Within the past half hour, that is, at about eleven o'clock tonight, the man calling himself Benjamin Bathurst was shot and killed by a sentry at the Ministry of Police, while attempting to escape from custody.

A sentry on duty in the rear courtyard of the Ministry observed a man attempting to leave the building in a suspicious and furtive manner. This sentry, who was under the strictest orders to allow no one to enter or leave without written authorization, challenged him; when he attempted to run, the sentry fired his musket at him, bringing him down. At the shot, the Sergeant of the Guard rushed into the courtyard with his detail, and the man whom the sentry had shot was found to be the Englishman, Benjamin Bathurst. He had been hit in the chest with an ounce ball, and died before the doctor could arrive, and without recovering consciousness.

An investigation revealed that the prisoner, who was confined on the third floor of the building, had fashioned a rope from his bedding, his bed cord, and the leather strap of his bell pull. This rope was only long enough to reach to the window of the office on the second floor, directly below, but he managed to enter this by kicking the glass out of the window. I am trying to find out how he could do this without being heard. I can assure you that somebody is going to smart for this night's work. As for the sentry, he acted within his orders; I have commended him for doing his duty, and for good shooting, and I assume full responsibility for the death of the prisoner at his hands.

I have no idea why the self-so-called Benjamin Bathurst, who, until now, was well-behaved and seemed to take his confinement philosophically, should suddenly make this rash and fatal attempt, unless it was because of those infernal dunderheads of madhouse doctors who have been bothering him. Only this afternoon they deliberately handed him a bundle of newspapers—Prussian, Austrian, French, and English—all dated within the last month. They wanted they said, to see how he would react. Well, God pardon them, they've found out!

What do you think should be done about giving the body burial?

Krutz

(From the British Minister, to the Count von Berchtenwald.)

December 20th, 1809

My dear Count von Berchtenwald:

Reply from London to my letter of the 28th, which accompanied the dispatch case and the other papers, has finally come to hand. The papers which you wanted returned—the copies of the statements taken at Perleburg, the letter to the Baron von Krutz from the police captain, Hartenstein, and the personal letter of Krutz's nephew, Lieutenant von Tarlburg, and the letter of safe-conduct found in the dispatch case—accompany herewith. I don't know what the people at Whitehall did with the other papers; tossed them into the nearest fire, for my guess. Were I in your place, that's where the papers I am returning would go.

I have heard nothing, yet, from my dispatch of the 29th concerning the death of the man who called himself Benjamin Bathurst, but I doubt very much if any official notice will ever be taken of it. Your government had a perfect right to detain the fellow, and, that being the case, he attempted to escape at his own risk. After all, sentries are not required to carry loaded muskets in order to discourage them from putting their hands in their pockets.

To hazard a purely unofficial opinion, I should not imagine that London is very much dissatisfied with this denouement. His Majesty's government are a hard-headed and matter-of-fact set of gentry who do not relish mysteries, least of all mysteries whose solution may be more disturbing than the original problem.

This is entirely confidential, but those papers which were in that dispatch case kicked up the devil's own row in London, with half the government bigwigs protesting their innocence to high Heaven, and the rest accusing one another of complicity in the hoax. If that was somebody's intention, it was literally a howling success. For a while, it was even feared that there would be questions in Parliament, but eventually, the whole vexatious business was hushed.

You may tell Count Tarlburg's son that his little friend is a most talented young lady; her sketch was highly commended by no less an authority than Sir Thomas Lawrence, and here comes the most bedeviling part of a thoroughly bedeviled business. The picture was instantly recognized. It is a very fair likeness of Benjamin Bathurst, or, I should say, Sir Benjamin Bathurst, who is King's lieutenant governor for the Crown Colony of Georgia. As Sir Thomas Lawrence did his portrait a few years back, he is in an excellent position to criticize the work of Lieutenant von Tarlburg's young lady. However, Sir Benjamin Bathurst was known to have been in Savannah, attending to the duties of his office, and in the public eye, all the while that his double was in Prussia. Sir Benjamin does not have a twin brother. It has been suggested that this fellow might be a half-brother, but, as far as I know, there is no justification for this theory.

The General Bonaparte, alias the Emperor Napoleon, who is given so much mention in the dispatches, seems also to have a counterpart in actual life; there is, in the French army, a Colonel of Artillery by that name, a Corsican who Gallicized

his original name of Napolione Buonaparte. He is a most brilliant military theoretician; I am sure some of your own officers, like General Scharnhorst, could tell you about him. His loyalty to the French monarchy has never been questioned.

This same correspondence to fact seems to crop up everywhere in that amazing collection of pseudo-dispatches and pseudo-State papers. The United States of America, you will recall, was the style by which the rebellious colonies referred to themselves, in the Declaration of Philadelphia. The James Madison who is mentioned as the current President of the United States is now living, in exile, in Switzerland. His alleged predecessor in office, Thomas Jefferson, was the author of the rebel Declaration; after the defeat of the rebels, he escaped to Havana, and died, several years ago, in the Principality of Lichtenstein.

I was quite amused to find our old friend Cardinal Talleyrand—without the ecclesiastical title—cast in the role of chief adviser to the usurper, Bonaparte. His Eminence, I have always thought, is the sort of fellow who would land on his feet on top of any heap, and who would as little scruple to be Prime Minister to His Satanic Majesty as to His Most Christian Majesty.

I was baffled, however, by one name, frequently mentioned in those fantastic papers. This was the English general, Wellington. I haven't the least idea who this person might be.

I have the honor, your excellency, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera,

Sir Arthur Wellesley

HELLHOUNDS OF THE COSMOS

Weird are the conditions of the interdimensional struggle faced by Dr. White's ninety-nine men.

The paper had gone to press, graphically describing the latest of the many horrible events which had been enacted upon the Earth in the last six months. The headlines screamed that Six Corners, a little hamlet in Pennsylvania, had been wiped out by the Horror. Another front-page story told of a Terror in the Amazon Valley which had sent the natives down the river in babbling fear. Other stories told of deaths here and there, all attributable to the "Black Horror," as it was called.

The telephone rang.

"Hello," said the editor.

"London calling," came the voice of the operator.

"All right," replied the editor.

He recognized the voice of Terry Masters, special correspondent. His voice came clearly over the transatlantic telephone.

"The Horror is attacking London in force," he said. "There are thousands of them and they have completely surrounded the city. All roads are blocked. The government declared the city under martial rule a quarter of an hour ago and efforts are being made to prepare for resistance against the enemy."

"Just a second," the editor shouted into the transmitter.

He touched a button on his desk and in a moment an answering buzz told him he was in communication with the press-room.

"Stop the presses!" he yelled into the speaking tube. "Get ready for a new front make-up!"

"O.K.," came faintly through the tube, and the editor turned back to the phone.

"Now let's have it," he said, and the voice at the London end of the wire droned on, telling the story that in another half hour was read by a world which shuddered in cold fear even as it scanned the glaring headlines.

"Woods," said the editor of the Press to a reporter, "run over and talk to Dr. Silas White. He phoned me to send someone. Something about this Horror business."

Henry Woods rose from his chair without a word and walked from the office. As he passed the wire machine it was tapping out, with a maddeningly methodical slowness, the story of the fall of London. Only half an hour before it had rapped forth the flashes concerning the attack on Paris and Berlin.

He passed out of the building into a street that was swarming with terrified humanity. Six months of terror, of numerous mysterious deaths, of villages blotted out, had set the world on edge. Now with London in possession of the Horror and Paris and Berlin fighting hopelessly for their lives, the entire population of the world was half insane with fright.

Exhorters on street corners enlarged upon the end of the world, asking that the people prepare for eternity, attributing the Horror to the act of a Supreme Being enraged with the wickedness of the Earth.

Expecting every moment an attack by the Horror, people left their work and gathered in the streets. Traffic, in places, had been blocked for hours and law and order were practically paralyzed. Commerce and transportation were disrupted as fright-ridden people fled from the larger cities, seeking doubtful hiding places in rural districts from the death that stalked the land.

A loudspeaker in front of a music store blared forth the latest news flashes.

"It has been learned," came the measured tones of the announcer, "that all communication with Berlin ceased about ten minutes ago. At Paris all efforts to hold the Horror at bay have been futile. Explosives blow it apart, but have the same effect upon it as explosion has on gas. It flies apart and then reforms again, not always in the same shape as it was before. A new gas, one of the most deadly ever conceived by man, has failed to have any effect on the things. Electric guns and heat guns have absolutely no effect upon them.

"A news flash which has just come in from Rome says that a large number of the Horrors has been sighted north of that city by airmen. It seems they are attacking the capitals of the world first. Word comes from Washington that every known form of defense is being amassed at that city. New York is also preparing...."

Henry Woods fought his way through the crowd which milled in front of the loudspeaker. The hum of excitement was giving away to a silence, the silence of a stunned people, the fearful silence of a populace facing a presence it is unable to understand, an embattled world standing with useless weapons before an incomprehensible enemy.

In despair the reporter looked about for a taxi, but realized, with a groan of resignation, that no taxi could possibly operate in that crowded street. A street

car, blocked by the stream of humanity which jostled and elbowed about it, stood still, a defeated thing.

Seemingly the only man with a definite purpose in that whirlpool of terror-stricken men and women, the newspaperman settled down to the serious business of battling his way through the swarming street.

"Before I go to the crux of the matter," said Dr. Silas White, about half an hour later, "let us first review what we know of this so-called Horror. Suppose you tell me exactly what you know of it."

Henry Woods shifted uneasily in his chair. Why didn't the old fool get down to business? The chief would raise hell if this story didn't make the regular edition. He stole a glance at his wrist-watch. There was still almost an hour left. Maybe he could manage it. If the old chap would only snap into it!

"I know no more," he said, "than is common knowledge."

The gimlet eyes of the old white-haired scientist regarded the newspaperman sharply.

"And that is?" he questioned.

There was no way out of it, thought Henry. He'd have to humor the old fellow.

"The Horror," he replied, "appeared on Earth, so far as the knowledge of man is concerned, about six months ago."

Dr. White nodded approvingly.

"You state the facts very aptly," he said.

"How so?"

"When you say 'so far as the knowledge of man is concerned.'"

"Why is that?"

"You will understand in due time. Please proceed."

Vaguely the newspaperman wondered whether he was interviewing the scientist or the scientist interviewing him.

"They were first reported," Woods said, "early this spring. At that time they wiped out a small village in the province of Quebec. All the inhabitants, except a few fugitives, were found dead, killed mysteriously and half eaten, as if by wild beasts. The fugitives were demented, babbling of black shapes that swept down out of the dark forest upon the little town in the small hours of the morning.

"The next that was heard of them was about a week later, when they struck in an isolated rural district in Poland, killing and feeding on the population of several farms. In the next week more villages were wiped out, in practically every country on the face of the Earth. From the hinterlands came tales of murder done at midnight, of men and women horribly mangled, of livestock slaughtered, of buildings crushed as if by some titanic force.

"At first they worked only at night and then, seeming to become bolder and more numerous, attacked in broad daylight."

The newspaperman paused.

"Is that what you want?" he asked.

"That's part of it," replied Dr. White, "but that's not all. What do these Horrors look like?"

"That's more difficult," said Henry. "They have been reported as every conceivable sort of monstrosity. Some are large and others are small. Some take the form of animals, others of birds and reptiles, and some are cast in appalling shapes such as might be snatched out of the horrid imagery of a thing which resided in a world entirely alien to our own."

Dr. White rose from his chair and strode across the room to confront the other.

"Young man," he asked, "do you think it possible the Horror might have come out of a world entirely alien to our own?"

"I don't know," replied Henry. "I know that some of the scientists believe they came from some other planet, perhaps even from some other solar system. I know they are like nothing ever known before on Earth. They are always inky black, something like black tar, you know, sort of sticky-looking, a disgusting sight. The weapons of mankind can't affect them. Explosives are useless and so are projectiles. They wade through poison gas and fiery chemicals and seem to enjoy them. Elaborate electrical barriers have failed. Heat doesn't make them turn a hair."

"And you think they came from some other planet, perhaps some other solar system?"

"I don't know what to think," said Henry. "If they came out of space they must have come in some conveyance, and that would certainly have been sighted, picked up long before it arrived, by our astronomers. If they came in small conveyances, there must have been many of them. If they came in a single conveyance, it would be too large to escape detection. That is, unless—"

"Unless what?" snapped the scientist.

"Unless it traveled at the speed of light. Then it would have been invisible."

"Not only invisible," snorted the old man, "but non-existent."

A question was on the tip of the newspaperman's tongue, but before it could be asked the old man was speaking again, asking a question:

"Can you imagine a fourth dimension?"

"No, I can't," said Henry.

"Can you imagine a thing of only two dimensions?"

"Vaguely, yes."

The scientist smote his palms together.

"Now we're coming to it!" he exclaimed.

Henry Woods regarded the other narrowly. The old man must be turned. What did fourth and second dimensions have to do with the Horror?

"Do you know anything about evolution?" questioned the old man.

"I have a slight understanding of it. It is the process of upward growth, the stairs by which simple organisms climb to become more complex organisms."

Dr. White grunted and asked still another question:

"Do you know anything about the theory of the exploding universe? Have you ever noted the tendency of the perfectly balanced to run amuck?"

The reporter rose slowly to his feet.

"Dr. White," he said, "you phoned my paper you had a story for us. I came here to get it, but all you have done is ask me questions. If you can't tell me what you want us to publish, I will say good-day."

The doctor put forth a hand that shook slightly.

"Sit down, young man," he said. "I don't blame you for being impatient, but I will now come to my point."

The newspaperman sat down again.

"I have developed a hypothesis," said Dr. White, "and have conducted several experiments which seem to bear it out. I am staking my reputation upon the supposition that it is correct. Not only that, but I am also staking the lives of several brave men who believe implicitly in me and my theory. After all, I suppose it makes little difference, for if I fail the world is doomed, if I succeed it is saved from complete destruction.

"Have you ever thought that our evolutionists might be wrong, that evolution might be downward instead of upward? The theory of the exploding universe, the belief that all of creation is running down, being thrown off balance by the loss of energy, spurred onward by cosmic accidents which tend to disturb its equilibrium, to a time when it will run wild and space will be filled with swirling dust of disintegrated worlds, would bear out this contention.

"This does not apply to the human race. There is no question that our evolution is upward, that we have arisen from one-celled creatures wallowing in the slime of primal seas. Our case is probably paralleled by thousands of other intelligences on far-flung planets and island universes. These instances, however, running at cross purposes to the general evolutional trend of the entire cosmos, are mere flashes in the eventual course of cosmic evolution, comparing no more to eternity than a split second does to a million years.

"Taking these instances, then, as inconsequential, let us say that the trend of cosmic evolution is downward rather than upward, from complex units to sim-

pler units rather than from simple units to more complex ones.

"Let us say that life and intelligence have degenerated. How would you say such a degeneration would take place? In just what way would it be manifested? What sort of transition would life pass through in passing from one stage to a lower one? Just what would be the nature of these stages?"

The scientist's eyes glowed brightly as he bent forward in his chair. The newspaperman said simply: "I have no idea."

"Man," cried the old man, "can't you see that it would be a matter of dimensions? From the fourth dimension to the third, from the third to the second, from the second to the first, from the first to a questionable existence or plane which is beyond our understanding or perhaps to oblivion and the end of life. Might not the fourth have evolved from a fifth, the fifth from a sixth, the sixth from a seventh, and so on to no one knows what multidimension?"

Dr. White paused to allow the other man to grasp the importance of his statements. Woods failed lamentably to do so.

"But what has this to do with the Horror?" he asked.

"Have you absolutely no imagination?" shouted the old man.

"Why, I suppose I have, but I seem to fail to understand."

"We are facing an invasion of fourth-dimensional creatures," the old man whispered, almost as if fearful to speak the words aloud. "We are being attacked by life which is one dimension above us in evolution. We are fighting, I tell you, a tribe of hellhounds out of the cosmos. They are unthinkably above us in the matter of intelligence. There is a chasm of knowledge between us so wide and so deep that it staggers the imagination. They regard us as mere animals, perhaps not even that. So far as they are concerned we are just fodder, something to be eaten as we eat vegetables and cereals or the flesh of domesticated animals. Perhaps they have watched us for years, watching life on the world increase, lapping their monstrous jowls over the fattening of the Earth. They have awaited the proper setting of the banquet table and now they are dining.

"Their thoughts are not our thoughts, their ideals not our ideals. Perhaps they have nothing in common with us except the primal basis of all life, self-preservation, the necessity of feeding.

"Maybe they have come of their own will. I prefer to believe that they have. Perhaps they are merely following the natural course of events, obeying some immutable law legislated by some higher being who watches over the cosmos and dictates what shall be and what shall not be. If this is true it means that there has been a flaw in my reasoning, for I believed that the life of each plane degenerated in company with the degeneration of its plane of existence, which would obey the same evolutional laws which govern the life upon it. I am quite satisfied that this invasion is a well-planned campaign, that some fourth-dimensional race

has found a means of breaking through the veil of force which separates its plane from ours."

"But," pointed out Henry Woods, "you say they are fourth-dimensional things. I can't see anything about them to suggest an additional dimension. They are plainly three-dimensional."

"Of course they are three-dimensional. They would have to be to live in this world of three dimensions. The only two-dimensional objects which we know of in this world are merely illusions, projections of the third dimension, like a shadow. It is impossible for more than one dimension to live on any single plane.

"To attack us they would have to lose one dimension. This they have evidently done. You can see how utterly ridiculous it would be for you to try to attack a two-dimensional thing. So far as you were concerned it would have no mass. The same is true of the other dimensions. Similarly a being of a lesser plane could not harm an inhabitant of a higher plane. It is apparent that while the Horror has lost one material dimension, it has retained certain fourth-dimensional properties which make it invulnerable to the forces at the command of our plane."

The newspaperman was now sitting on the edge of his chair.

"But," he asked breathlessly, "it all sounds so hopeless. What can be done about it?"

Dr. White hitched his chair closer and his fingers closed with a fierce grasp upon the other's knee. A militant boom came into his voice.

"My boy," he said, "we are to strike back. We are going to invade the fourth-dimensional plane of these hellhounds. We are going to make them feel our strength. We are going to strike back."

Henry Woods sprang to his feet.

"How?" he shouted. "Have you...?"

Dr. White nodded.

"I have found a way to send the third-dimensional into the fourth. Come and I will show you."

The machine was huge, but it had an appearance of simple construction. A large rectangular block of what appeared to be a strange black metal was set on end and flanked on each side by two smaller ones. On the top of the large block was set a half-globe of a strange substance, somewhat, Henry thought, like frosted glass. On one side of the large cube was set a lever, a long glass panel, two vertical tubes and three clock-face indicators. The control board, it appeared, was relatively simple.

Beside the mass of the five rectangles, on the floor, was a large plate of transparent substance, ground to a concave surface, through which one could see an intricate tangle of wire mesh.

Hanging from the ceiling, directly above the one on the floor, was another concave disk, but this one had a far more pronounced curvature.

Wires connected the two disks and each in turn was connected to the rectangular machine.

"It is a matter of the proper utilization of two forces, electrical and gravitational," proudly explained Dr. White. "Those two forces, properly used, warp the third-dimensional into the fourth. A reverse process is used to return the object to the third. The principle of the machine is—"

The old man was about to launch into a lengthy discussion, but Henry interrupted him. A glance at his watch had shown him press time was drawing perilously close.

"Just a second," he said. "You propose to warp a third-dimensional being into a fourth dimension. How can a third-dimensional thing exist there? You said a short time ago that only a specified dimension could exist on one single plane."

"You have missed my point," snapped Dr. White. "I am not sending a third-dimensional thing to a fourth dimension. I am changing the third-dimensional being into a fourth-dimensional being. I add a dimension, and automatically the being exists on a different plane. I am reversing evolution. This third dimension we now exist on evolved, millions of eons ago, from a fourth dimension. I am sending a lesser entity back over those millions of eons to a plane similar to one upon which his ancestors lived inconceivably long ago."

"But, man, how do you know you can do it?"

The doctor's eyes gleamed and his fingers reached out to press a bell.

A servant appeared almost at once.

"Bring me a dog," snapped the old man. The servant disappeared.

"Young man," said Dr. White, "I am going to show you how I know I can do it. I have done it before, now I am going to do it for you. I have sent dogs and cats back to the fourth dimension and returned them safely to this room. I can do the same with men."

The servant reappeared, carrying in his arms a small dog. The doctor stepped to the control board of his strange machine.

"All right, George," he said.

The servant had evidently worked with the old man enough to know what was expected of him. He stepped close to the floor disk and waited. The dog whined softly, sensing that all was not exactly right.

The old scientist slowly shoved the lever toward the right, and as he did so a faint hum filled the room, rising to a stupendous roar as he advanced the lever. From both floor disk and upper disk leaped strange cones of blue light, which met midway to form an hour-glass shape of brilliance.

The light did not waver or sparkle. It did not glow. It seemed hard and brittle, like straight bars of force. The newspaperman, gazing with awe upon it, felt that terrific force was there. What had the old man said? Warp a third-dimensional being into another dimension! That would take force!

As he watched, petrified by the spectacle, the servant stepped forward and, with a flip, tossed the little dog into the blue light. The animal could be discerned for a moment through the light and then it disappeared.

"Look in the globe!" shouted the old man; and Henry jerked his eyes from the column of light to the half-globe atop the machine.

He gasped. In the globe, deep within its milky center, glowed a picture that made his brain reel as he looked upon it. It was a scene such as no man could have imagined unaided. It was a horribly distorted projection of an eccentric landscape, a landscape hardly analogous to anything on Earth.

"That's the fourth dimension, sir," said the servant.

"That's not the fourth dimension," the old man corrected him. "That's a third-dimensional impression of the fourth dimension. It is no more the fourth dimension than a shadow is three-dimensional. It, like a shadow, is merely a projection. It gives us a glimpse of what the fourth plane is like. It is a shadow of that plane."

Slowly a dark blotch began to grow in the landscape. Slowly it assumed definite form. It puzzled the reporter. It looked familiar. He could have sworn he had seen it somewhere before. It was alive, for it had moved.

"That, sir, is the dog," George volunteered.

"That was the dog," Dr. White again corrected him. "God knows what it is now."

He turned to the newspaperman.

"Have you seen enough?" he demanded.

Henry nodded.

The other slowly began to return the lever to its original position. The roaring subsided, the light faded, the projection in the half-globe grew fainter.

"How are you going to use it?" asked the newspaperman.

"I have ninety-eight men who have agreed to be projected into the fourth dimension to seek out the entities that are attacking us and attack them in turn. I shall send them out in an hour."

"Where is there a phone?" asked the newspaperman.

"In the next room," replied Dr. White.

As the reporter dashed out of the door, the light faded entirely from between the two disks and on the lower one a little dog crouched, quivering, softly whimpering.

The old man stepped from the controls and approached the disk. He scooped

the little animal from where it lay into his arms and patted the silky head.

"Good dog," he murmured; and the creature snuggled close to him, comforted, already forgetting that horrible place from which it had just returned.

"Is everything ready, George?" asked the old man.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant. "The men are all ready, even anxious to go. If you ask me, sir, they are a tough lot."

"They are as brave a group of men as ever graced the Earth," replied the scientist gently. "They are adventurers, every one of whom has faced danger and will not shrink from it. They are born fighters. My one regret is that I have not been able to secure more like them. A thousand men such as they should be able to conquer any opponent. It was impossible. The others were poor soft fools. They laughed in my face. They thought I was an old fool—I, the man who alone stands between them and utter destruction."

His voice had risen to almost a scream, but it again sank to a normal tone.

"I may be sending ninety-eight brave men to instant death. I hope not."

"You can always jerk them back, sir," suggested George.

"Maybe I can, maybe not," murmured the old man.

Henry Woods appeared in the doorway.

"When do we start?" he asked.

"We?" exclaimed the scientist.

"Certainly, you don't believe you're going to leave me out of this. Why, man, it's the greatest story of all time. I'm going as special war correspondent."

"They believed it? They are going to publish it?" cried the old man, clutching at the newspaperman's sleeve.

"Well, the editor was skeptical at first, but after I swore on all sorts of oaths it was true, he ate it up. Maybe you think that story didn't stop the presses!"

"I didn't expect them to. I just took a chance. I thought they, too, would laugh at me."

"But when do we start?" persisted Henry.

"You are really in earnest? You really want to go?" asked the old man, unbelievingly.

"I am going. Try to stop me."

Dr. White glanced at his watch.

"We will start in exactly thirty-four minutes," he said.

"Ten seconds to go." George, standing with watch in hand, spoke in a precise manner, the very crispness of his words betraying the excitement under which he labored.

The blue light, hissing, drove from disk to disk; the room thundered with

the roar of the machine, before which stood Dr. White, his hand on the lever, his eyes glued on the instruments before him.

In a line stood the men who were to fling themselves into the light to be warped into another dimension, there to seek out and fight an unknown enemy. The line was headed by a tall man with hands like hams, with a weather-beaten face and a wild mop of hair. Behind him stood a belligerent little cockney. Henry Woods stood fifth in line. They were a motley lot, adventurers every one of them, and some were obviously afraid as they stood before that column of light, with only a few seconds of the third dimension left to them. They had answered a weird advertisement, and had but a limited idea of what they were about to do. Grimly, though, they accepted it as a job, a bizarre job, but a job. They faced it as they had faced other equally dangerous, but less unusual, jobs.

"Five seconds," snapped George.

The lever was all the way over now. The half-globe showed, within its milky interior, a hideously distorted landscape. The light had taken on a hard, brittle appearance and its hiss had risen to a scream. The machine thundered steadily with a suggestion of horrible power.

"Time up!"

The tall man stepped forward. His foot reached the disk; another step and he was bathed in the light, a third and he glimmered momentarily, then vanished. Close on his heels followed the little cockney.

With his nerves at almost a snapping point, Henry moved on behind the fourth man. He was horribly afraid, he wanted to break from the line and run, it didn't matter where, any place to get away from that steady, steely light in front of him. He had seen three men step into it, glow for a second, and then disappear. A fourth man had placed his foot on the disk.

Cold sweat stood out on his brow. Like an automaton he placed one foot on the disk. The fourth man had already disappeared.

"Snap into it, pal," growled the man behind.

Henry lifted the other foot, caught his toe on the edge of the disk and stumbled headlong into the column of light.

He was conscious of intense heat which was instantly followed by equally intense cold. For a moment his body seemed to be under enormous pressure, then it seemed to be expanding, flying apart, bursting, exploding....

He felt solid ground under his feet, and his eyes, snapping open, saw an alien land. It was a land of somber color, with great gray moors, and beetling black cliffs. There was something queer about it, an intangible quality that baffled him.

He looked about him, expecting to see his companions. He saw no one. He

was absolutely alone in that desolate brooding land. Something dreadful had happened! Was he the only one to be safely transported from the third dimension? Had some horrible accident occurred? Was he alone?

Sudden panic seized him. If something had happened, if the others were not here, might it not be possible that the machine would not be able to bring him back to his own dimension? Was he doomed to remain marooned forever in this terrible plane?

He looked down at his body and gasped in dismay. It was not his body!

It was a grotesque caricature of a body, a horrible profane mass of flesh, like a phantasmagoric beast snatched from the dreams of a lunatic.

It was real, however. He felt it with his hands, but they were not hands. They were something like hands; they served the same purpose that hands served in the third dimension. He was, he realized, a being of the fourth dimension, but in his fourth-dimensional brain still clung hard-fighting remnants of that faithful old third-dimensional brain. He could not, as yet, see with fourth-dimensional eyes, think purely fourth-dimensional thoughts. He had not oriented himself as yet to this new plane of existence. He was seeing the fourth dimension through the blurred lenses of millions of eons of third-dimensional existence. He was seeing it much more clearly than he had seen it in the half-globe atop the machine in Dr. White's laboratory, but he would not see it clearly until every vestige of the third dimension was wiped from him. That, he knew, would come in time.

He felt his weird body with those things that served as hands, and he found, beneath his groping, unearthly fingers, great rolling muscles, powerful tendons, and hard, well-conditioned flesh. A sense of well-being surged through him and he growled like an animal, like an animal of that horrible fourth plane.

But the terrible sounds that came from between his slobbering lips were not those of his own voice, they were the voices of many men.

Then he knew. He was not alone. Here, in this one body were the bodies, the brains, the power, the spirit, of those other ninety-eight men. In the fourth dimension, all the millions of third-dimensional things were one. Perhaps that particular portion of the third dimension called the Earth had sprung from, or degenerated from, one single unit of a dissolving, worn-out fourth dimension. The third dimension, warped back to a higher plane, was automatically obeying the mystic laws of evolution by reforming in the shape of that old ancestor, unimaginably removed in time from the race he had begot. He was no longer Henry Woods, newspaperman; he was an entity that had given birth, in the dim ages when the Earth was born, to a third dimension. Nor was he alone. This body of his was composed of other sons of that ancient entity.

He felt himself grow, felt his body grow vaster, assume greater proportions, felt new vitality flow through him. It was the other men, the men who were flinging

themselves into the column of light in the laboratory to be warped back to this plane, to be incorporated in his body.

It was not his body, however. His brain was not his alone. The pronoun, he realized, represented the sum total of those other men, his fellow adventurers.

Suddenly a new feeling came, a feeling of completeness, a feeling of supreme fitness. He knew that the last of the ninety-eight men had stepped across the disk, that all were here in this giant body.

Now he could see more clearly. Things in the landscape, which had escaped him before, became recognizable. Awful thoughts ran through his brain, heavy, ponderous, black thoughts. He began to recognize the landscape as something familiar, something he had seen before, a thing with which he was intimate. Phenomena, which his third-dimensional intelligence would have gasped at, became commonplace. He was finally seeing through fourth-dimensional eyes, thinking fourth-dimensional thoughts.

Memory seeped into his brain and he had fleeting visions, visions of dark caverns lit by hellish flames, of huge seas that battered remorselessly with mile-high waves against towering headlands that reared titanic toward a glowering sky. He remembered a red desert scattered with scarlet boulders, he remembered silver cliffs of gleaming metallic stone. Through all his thoughts ran something else, a scarlet thread of hate, an all-consuming passion, a fierce lust after the life of some other entity.

He was no longer a composite thing built of third-dimensional beings. He was a creature of another plane, a creature with a consuming hate, and suddenly he knew against whom this hate was directed and why. He knew also that this creature was near and his great fists closed and then spread wide as he knew it. How did he know it? Perhaps through some sense which he, as a being of another plane, held, but which was alien to the Earth. Later, he asked himself this question. At the time, however, there was no questioning on his part. He only knew that somewhere near was a hated enemy and he did not question the source of his knowledge....

Mumbling in an idiom incomprehensible to a third-dimensional being, filled with rage that wove redly through his brain, he lumbered down the hill onto the moor, his great strides eating up the distance, his footsteps shaking the ground.

At the foot of the hill he halted and from his throat issued a challenging roar that made the very crags surrounding the moor tremble. The rocks flung back the roar as if in mockery.

Again he shouted and in the shout he framed a lurid insult to the enemy that lurked there in the cliffs.

Again the crags flung back the insult, but this time the echoes, booming over the moor, were drowned by another voice, the voice of the enemy.

At the far end of the moor appeared a gigantic form, a form that shambled on grotesque, misshapen feet, growling angrily as he came.

He came rapidly despite his clumsy gait, and as he came he mouthed terrific threats.

Close to the other he halted and only then did recognition dawn in his eyes.

"You, Mal Shaff?" he growled in his guttural tongue, and surprise and consternation were written large upon his ugly face.

"Yes, it is I, Mal Shaff," boomed the other. "Remember, Ouglat, the day you destroyed me and my plane. I have returned to wreak my vengeance. I have solved a mystery you have never guessed and I have come back. You did not imagine you were attacking me again when you sent your minions to that other plane to feed upon the beings there. It was I you were attacking, fool, and I am here to kill you."

Ouglat leaped and the thing that had been Henry Woods, newspaperman, and ninety-eight other men, but was now Mal Shaff of the fourth dimension, leaped to meet him.

Mal Shaff felt the force of Ouglat, felt the sharp pain of a hammering fist, and lashed out with those horrible arms of his to smash at the leering face of his antagonist. He felt his fists strike solid flesh, felt the bones creak and tremble beneath his blow.

His nostrils were filled with the terrible stench of the other's foul breath and his filthy body. He teetered on his gnarled legs and side-stepped a vicious kick and then stepped in to gouge with straightened thumb at the other's eye. The thumb went true and Ouglat howled in pain.

Mal Shaff leaped back as his opponent charged head down, and his knotted fist beat a thunderous tattoo as the misshapen beast closed in. He felt clawing fingers seeking his throat, felt ghastly nails ripping at his shoulders. In desperation he struck blindly, and Ouglat reeled away. With a quick stride he shortened the distance between them and struck Ouglat a hard blow squarely on his slavering mouth. Pressing hard upon the reeling figure, he swung his fists like sledgehammers, and Ouglat stumbled, falling in a heap on the sand.

Mal Shaff leaped upon the fallen foe and kicked him with his taloned feet, ripping him wickedly. There was no thought of fair play, no faintest glimmer of mercy. This was a battle to the death: there could be no quarter.

The fallen monster howled, but his voice cut short as his foul mouth, with its razor-edged fangs, closed on the other's body. His talons, seeking a hold, clawed deep.

Mal Shaff, his brain a screaming maelstrom of weird emotions, aimed piledriver blows at the enemy, clawed and ripped. Together the two rolled, locked tight in titanic battle, on the sandy plain and a great cloud of heavy dust marked

where they struggled.

In desperation Ouglat put every ounce of his strength into a heave that broke the other's grip and flung him away.

The two monstrosities surged to their feet, their eyes red with hate, glaring through the dust cloud at one another.

Slowly Ouglat's hand stole to a black, wicked cylinder that hung on a belt at his waist. His fingers closed upon it and he drew the weapon. As he leveled it at Mal Shaff, his lips curled back and his features distorted into something that was not pleasant to see.

Mal Shaff, with doubled fists, saw the great thumb of his enemy slowly depressing a button on the cylinder, and a great fear held him rooted in his tracks. In the back of his brain something was vainly trying to explain to him the horror of this thing which the other held.

Then a multicolored spiral, like a corkscrew column of vapor, sprang from the cylinder and flashed toward him. It struck him full on the chest and even as it did so he caught the ugly fire of triumph in the red eyes of his enemy.

He felt a stinging sensation where the spiral struck, but that was all. He was astounded. He had feared this weapon, had been sure it portended some form of horrible death. But all it did was to produce a slight sting.

For a split second he stood stock-still, then he surged forward and advanced upon Ouglat, his hands outspread like claws. From his throat came those horrible sounds, the speech of the fourth dimension.

"Did I not tell you, foul son of Sargouthe, that I had solved a mystery you have never guessed at? Although you destroyed me long ago, I have returned. Throw away your puny weapon. I am of the lower dimension and am invulnerable to your engines of destruction. You bloated...." His words trailed off into a stream of vileness that could never have occurred to a third-dimensional mind.

Ouglat, with every line of his face distorted with fear, flung the weapon from him, and turning, fled clumsily down the moor, with Mal Shaff at his heels.

Steadily Mal Shaff gained and with only a few feet separating him from Ouglat, he dived with outspread arms at the other's legs.

The two came down together, but Mal Shaff's grip was broken by the fall and the two regained their feet at almost the same instant.

The wild moor resounded to their throaty roaring and the high cliffs flung back the echoes of the bellowing of the two gladiators below. It was sheer strength now and flesh and bone were bruised and broken under the life-shaking blows that they dealt. Great furrows were plowed in the sand by the sliding of heavy feet as the two fighters shifted to or away from attack. Blood, blood of fourth-dimensional creatures, covered the bodies of the two and stained the sand with its hor-

rible hue. Perspiration streamed from them and their breath came in gulping gasps.

The lurid sun slid across the purple sky and still the two fought on. Ouglat, one of the ancients, and Mal Shaff, reincarnated. It was a battle of giants, a battle that must have beggared even the titanic tilting of forgotten gods and entities in the ages when the third-dimensional Earth was young.

Mal Shaff had no conception of time. He may have fought seconds or hours. It seemed an eternity. He had attempted to fight scientifically, but had failed to do so. While one part of him had cried out to elude his opponent, to wait for openings, to conserve his strength, another part had shouted at him to step in and smash, smash, smash at the hated monstrosity pitted against him.

It seemed Ouglat was growing in size, had become more agile, that his strength was greater. His punches hurt more; it was harder to hit him.

Still Mal Shaff drilled in determinedly, head down, fists working like pistons. As the other seemed to grow stronger and larger, he seemed to become smaller and weaker.

It was queer. Ouglat should be tired, too. His punches should be weaker. He should move more slowly, be heavier on his feet.

There was no doubt of it. Ouglat was growing larger, was drawing on some mysterious reserve of strength. From somewhere new force and life were flowing into his body. But from where was this strength coming?

A huge fist smashed against Mal Shaff's jaw. He felt himself lifted, and the next moment he skidded across the sand.

Lying there, gasping for breath, almost too fagged to rise, with the black bulk of the enemy looming through the dust cloud before him, he suddenly realized the source of the other's renewed strength.

Ouglat was recalling his minions from the third dimension! They were incorporating in his body, returning to their parent body!

They were coming back from the third dimension to the fourth dimension to fight a third-dimensional thing reincarnated in the fourth-dimensional form it had lost millions of eons ago!

This was the end, thought Mal Shaff. But he staggered to his feet to meet the charge of the ancient enemy and a grim song, a death chant immeasurably old, suddenly and dimly remembered from out of the mists of countless millenniums, was on his lips as he swung a pile-driver blow into the suddenly astonished face of the rushing Ouglat....

The milky globe atop the machine in Dr. White's laboratory glowed softly, and within that glow two figures seemed to struggle.

Before the machine, his hands still on the controls, stood Dr. Silas White. Behind him the room was crowded with newspapermen and photographers.

Hours had passed since the ninety-eight men—ninety-nine, counting Henry Woods—had stepped into the brittle column of light to be shunted back through unguessed time to a different plane of existence. The old scientist, during all those hours, had stood like a graven image before his machine, eyes staring fixedly at the globe.

Through the open windows he had heard the cry of the newsboy as the Press put the greatest scoop of all time on the street. The phone had rung like mad and George answered it. The doorbell buzzed repeatedly and George ushered in newspapermen who had asked innumerable questions, to which he had replied briefly, almost mechanically. The reporters had fought for the use of the one phone in the house and had finally drawn lots for it. A few had raced out to use other phones.

Photographers came and flashes popped and cameras clicked. The room was in an uproar. On the rare occasions when the reporters were not using the phone the instrument buzzed shrilly. Authoritative voices demanded Dr. Silas White. George, his eyes on the old man, stated that Dr. Silas White could not be disturbed, that he was busy.

From the street below came the heavy-throated hum of thousands of voices. The street was packed with a jostling crowd of awed humanity, every eye fastened on the house of Dr. Silas White. Lines of police held them back.

"What makes them move so slowly?" asked a reporter, staring at the globe. "They hardly seem to be moving. It looks like a slow motion picture."

"They are not moving slowly," replied Dr. White. "There must be a difference in time in the fourth dimension. Maybe what is hours to us is only seconds to them. Time must flow more slowly there. Perhaps it is a bigger place than this third plane. That may account for it. They aren't moving slowly, they are fighting savagely. It's a fight to the death! Watch!"

The grotesque arm of one of the figures in the milky globe was moving out slowly, loafing along, aimed at the head of the other. Slowly the other twisted his body aside, but too slowly. The fist finally touched the head, still moving slowly forward, the body following as slowly. The head of the creature twisted, bent backward, and the body toppled back in a leisurely manner.

"What does White say?... Can't you get a statement of some sort from him? Won't he talk at all? A hell of a fine reporter you are—can't even get a man to open his mouth. Ask him about Henry Woods. Get a human-interest slant on Woods walking into the light. Ask him how long this is going to last. Damn it all, man, do something, and don't bother me again until you have a real story—yes, I said a real story—are you hard of hearing? For God's sake, do something!"

The editor slammed the receiver on the hook.

"Brooks," he snapped, "get the War Department at Washington. Ask them

if they're going to back up White. Go on, go on. Get busy.... How will you get them? I don't know. Just get them, that's all. Get them!"

Typewriters gibbered like chuckling morons through the roaring tumult of the editorial rooms. Copy boys rushed about, white sheets clutched in their grimy hands. Telephones jangled and strident voices blared through the haze that arose from the pipes and cigarettes of perspiring writers who feverishly transferred to paper the startling events that were rocking the world.

The editor, his necktie off, his shirt open, his sleeves rolled to the elbow, drummed his fingers on the desk. It had been a hectic twenty-four hours and he had stayed at the desk every minute of the time. He was dead tired. When the moment of relaxation came, when the tension snapped, he knew he would fall into an exhausted stupor of sleep, but the excitement was keeping him on his feet. There was work to do. There was news such as the world had never known before. Each new story meant a new front make-up, another extra. Even now the presses were thundering, even now papers with the ink hardly dry upon them were being snatched by the avid public from the hands of screaming newsboys.

A man raced toward the city desk, waving a sheet of paper in his hand. Sensing something unusual the others in the room crowded about as he laid the sheet before the editor.

"Just came in," the man gasped.

The paper was a wire dispatch. It read:

"Rome—The Black Horror is in full retreat. Although still apparently immune to the weapons being used against it, it is lifting the siege of this city. The cause is unknown."

The editor ran his eye down the sheet. There was another dateline:

"Madrid—The Black Horror, which has enclosed this city in a ring of dark terror for the last two days, is fleeing, rapidly disappearing...."

The editor pressed a button. There was an answering buzz.

"Composing room," he shouted, "get ready for a new front! Yes, another extra. This will knock their eyes out!"

A telephone jangled furiously. The editor seized it.

"Yes. What was that?... White says he must have help. I see. Woods and the others are weakening. Being badly beaten, eh?... More men needed to go out to the other plane. Wants reinforcements. Yes. I see. Well, tell him that he'll have them. If he can wait half an hour we'll have them walking by thousands into that light. I'll be damned if we won't! Just tell White to hang on! We'll have the whole nation coming to the rescue!"

He jabbed up the receiver.

"Richards," he said, "write a streamer, 'Help Needed,' 'Reinforcements

Called'—something of that sort, you know. Make it scream. Tell the foreman to dig out the biggest type he has. A foot high. If we ever needed big type, we need it now!"

He turned to the telephone.

"Operator," he said, "get me the Secretary of War at Washington. The secretary in person, you understand. No one else will do."

He turned again to the reporters who stood about the desk.

"In two hours," he explained, banging the desk top for emphasis, "we'll have the United States Army marching into that light Woods walked into!"

The bloody sun was touching the edge of the weird world, seeming to hesitate before taking the final plunge behind the towering black crags that hung above the ink-pot shadows at their base. The purple sky had darkened until it was almost the color of soft, black velvet. Great stars were blazing out.

Ouglat loomed large in the gathering twilight, a horrible misshapen ogre of an outer world. He had grown taller, broader, greater. Mal Shaff's head now was on a level with the other's chest; his huge arms seemed toylike in comparison with those of Ouglat, his legs mere pipestems.

Time and time again he had barely escaped as the clutching hands of Ouglat reached out to grasp him. Once within those hands he would be torn apart.

The battle had become a game of hide and seek, a game of cat and mouse, with Mal Shaff the mouse.

Slowly the sun sank and the world became darker. His brain working feverishly, Mal Shaff waited for the darkness. Adroitly he worked the battle nearer and nearer to the Stygian darkness that lay at the foot of the mighty crags. In the darkness he might escape. He could no longer continue this unequal fight. Only escape was left.

The sun was gone now. Blackness was dropping swiftly over the land, like a great blanket, creating the illusion of the glowering sky descending to the ground. Only a few feet away lay the total blackness under the cliffs.

Like a flash Mal Shaff darted into the blackness, was completely swallowed in it. Roaring, Ouglat followed.

His shoulders almost touching the great rock wall that shot straight up hundreds of feet above him, Mal Shaff ran swiftly, fear lending speed to his shivering legs. Behind him he heard the bellowing of his enemy. Ouglat was searching for him, a hopeless search in that total darkness. He would never find him. Mal Shaff felt sure.

Fagged and out of breath, he dropped panting at the foot of the wall. Blood pounded through his head and his strength seemed to be gone. He lay still and stared out into the less dark moor that stretched before him.

For some time he lay there, resting. Aimlessly he looked out over the moor, and then he suddenly noted, some distance to his right, a hill rising from the moor. The hill was vaguely familiar. He remembered it dimly as being of great importance.

A sudden inexplicable restlessness filled him. Far behind him he heard the enraged bellowing of Ouglat, but that he scarcely noticed. So long as darkness lay upon the land he knew he was safe from his enemy.

The hill had made him restless. He must reach the top. He could think of no logical reason for doing so. Obviously he was safer here at the base of the cliff, but a voice seemed to be calling, a friendly voice from the hilltop.

He rose on aching legs and forged ahead. Every fiber of his being cried out in protest, but resolutely he placed one foot ahead of the other, walking mechanically.

Opposite the hill he disregarded the strange call that pulsed down upon him, long enough to rest his tortured body. He must build up his strength for the climb.

He realized that danger lay ahead. Once he quitted the blackness of the cliff's base, Ouglat, even in the darkness that lay over the land, might see him. That would be disastrous. Once over the top of the hill he would be safe.

Suddenly the landscape was bathed in light, a soft green radiance. One moment it had been pitch dark, the next it was light, as if a giant search-light had been snapped on.

In terror, Mal Shaff looked for the source of the light. Just above the horizon hung a great green orb, which moved up the ladder of the sky even as he watched.

A moon! A huge green satellite hurtling swiftly around this cursed world!

A great, overwhelming fear sat upon Mal Shaff and with a high, shrill scream of anger he raced forward, forgetful of aching body and outraged lungs.

His scream was answered from far off, and out of the shadows of the cliffs toward the far end of the moor a black figure hurled itself. Ouglat was on the trail!

Mal Shaff tore madly up the slope, topped the crest, and threw himself flat on the ground, almost exhausted.

A queer feeling stole over him, a queer feeling of well-being. New strength was flowing into him, the old thrill of battle was pounding through his blood once more.

Not only were queer things happening to his body, but also to his brain. The world about him looked queer, held a sort of an intangible mystery he could not understand. A half question formed in the back of his brain. Who and what was he? Queer thoughts to be thinking! He was Mal Shaff, but had he always been Mal Shaff?

He remembered a brittle column of light, creatures with bodies unlike his body, walking into it. He had been one of those creatures. There was something about dimensions, about different planes, a plan for one plane to attack another!

He scrambled to his bowed legs and beat his great chest with mighty, long-nailed hands. He flung back his head and from his throat broke a sound to curdle the blood of even the bravest.

On the moor below Ouglat heard the cry and answered it with one equally ferocious.

Mal Shaff took a step forward, then stopped stock-still. Through his brain went a sharp command to return to the spot where he had stood, to wait there until attacked. He stepped back, shifting his feet impatiently.

He was growing larger; every second fresh vitality was pouring into him. Before his eyes danced a red curtain of hate and his tongue roared forth a series of insulting challenges to the figure that was even now approaching the foot of the hill.

As Ouglat climbed the hill, the night became an insane bedlam. The challenging roars beat like surf against the black cliffs.

Ouglat's lips were flecked with foam, his red eyes were mere slits, his mouth worked convulsively.

They were only a few feet apart when Ouglat charged.

Mal Shaff was ready for him. There was no longer any difference in their size and they met like the two forward walls of contending football teams.

Mal Shaff felt the soft throat of the other under his fingers and his grip tightened. Maddened, Ouglat shot terrific blow after terrific blow into Mal Shaff's body.

Try as he might, however, he could not shake the other's grip.

It was silent now. The night seemed brooding, watching the struggle on the hilltop.

Larger and larger grew Mal Shaff, until he overtopped Ouglat like a giant.

Then he loosened his grip and, as Ouglat tried to scuttle away, reached down to grasp him by the nape of his neck.

High above his head he lifted his enemy and dashed him to the ground. With a leap he was on the prostrate figure, trampling it apart, smashing it into the ground. With wild cries he stamped the earth, treading out the last of Ouglat, the Black Horror.

When no trace of the thing that had been Ouglat remained, he moved away and viewed the trampled ground.

Then, for the first time he noticed that the crest of the hill was crowded with other monstrous figures. He glared at them, half in surprise, half in anger. He had not noticed their silent approach.

"It is Mal Shaff!" cried one.

"Yes, I am Mal Shaff. What do you want?"

"But, Mal Shaff, Ouglat destroyed you once long ago!"

"And I, just now," replied Mal Shaff, "have destroyed Ouglat."

The figures were silent, shifting uneasily. Then one stepped forward.

"Mal Shaff," it said, "we thought you were dead. Apparently it was not so. We welcome you to our land again. Ouglat, who once tried to kill you and apparently failed, you have killed, which is right and proper. Come and live with us again in peace. We welcome you."

Mal Shaff bowed.

Gone was all thought of the third dimension. Through Mal Shaff's mind raced strange, haunting memories of a red desert scattered with scarlet boulders, of silver cliffs of gleaming metallic stone, of huge seas battering against towering headlands. There were other things, too. Great palaces of shining jewels, and weird nights of inhuman joy where hellish flames lit deep, black caverns.

He bowed again.

"I thank you, Bathazar," he said.

Without a backward look he shambled down the hill with the others.

"Yes?" said the editor. "What's that you say? Doctor White is dead! A suicide! Yeah, I understand. Worry, hey! Here, Roberts, take this story."

He handed over the phone.

"When you write it," he said, "play up the fact he was worried about not being able to bring the men back to the third dimension. Give him plenty of praise for ending the Black Horror. It's a big story."

"Sure," said Roberts, then spoke into the phone: "All right, Bill, shoot the works."

A SON OF THE GODS AND A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY

The Introduction

Brilliant and magnetic as are these two studies by Ambrose Bierce, and especially significant as coming from one who was a boy soldier in the Civil War, they merely reflect one side of his original and many-faceted genius. Poet, critic, satirist, fun-maker, incomparable writer of fables and masterly prose sketches, a seer of startling insight, a reasoner mercilessly logical, with the delicate wit and keenness of an Irving or an Addison, the dramatic quality of a Hugo, - all of these, and still in the prime of his powers; yet so restricted has been his output and so little exploited that only the judicious few have been impressed.

Although an American, he formed his bent years ago in London, where he was associated with the younger Hood on Fun. There he laid the foundation for that reputation which he today enjoys: the distinction of being the last of the scholarly satirists. With that training he came to San Francisco, where, in an environment equally as genial, his talent grew and mellowed through the years. Then he was summoned to New York to assist a newspaper fight against a great railroad, since the conclusion of which brilliant campaign eastern journalism and magazine work have claimed his attention.

Two volumes, "The Fiend's Delight" and "Cobwebs from an Empty Skull" titles that would damn modern books - were collections published years ago from his work on London Fun. Their appearance made him at once the chief wit and humorist of England, and, combined with his satirical work on Fun, led to his engagement by friends of the exiled EugÈnie to conduct a periodical against her enemies, who purposed to make her refuge in England untenable by means of newspaper attacks. It is easy to imagine the zest with which the chivalrous Bierce plunged into preparations for the fight. But the struggle never came; it was sufficient to learn that Bierce would be the Richmond; the attack upon the stricken exempress was abandoned.

When he was urged in San Francisco, years afterward, to write more of the inimitable things that filled those two volumes, he said that it was only fun, a boy's

work. Only fun! There has never been such delicious fun since the beginning of literature, and there is nothing better than fun. Yet it held his own peculiar quality, which is not that of American fun, - quality of a brilliant intellectuality: the keenness of a rapier, a teasing subtlety, a contempt for pharisaism and squeamishness, and above all a fine philosophy. While he has never lost his sense of the whimsical, the grotesque, the unusual, he - unfortunately, perhaps -came oftener to give it the form of pure wit rather than of cajoling humor. Few Americans know him as a humorist, because his humor is not built on the broad, rough lines that are typically American. It belongs to an older civilization, yet it is jollier than the English and bolder than the French.

At all times his incomparable wit and satire has appealed rather to the cultured, and even the emotional quality of his fiction is frequently so profound and unusual as to be fully enjoyed only by the intellectually untrammelled. His writing was never for those who could only read and feel, not think.

Another factor against his wider acceptance has been the infrequency and fragmentary character of his work, particularly his satire. No sustained fort in that field has come from him. His satire was born largely of a transient stimulus, and was evanescent. Even his short stories are, generally, but blinding flashes of a moment in a life. He laughingly ascribes the meagerness of his output to indolence; but there may be a deeper reason, of which he is unconscious. What is more dampening than a seeming lack of appreciation? "Tales of Soldiers and Civilians" had a disheartening search for an established publisher, and finally was brought out by an admiring merchant of San Francisco. It attracted so much critical attention that its re-publication was soon undertaken by a regular house.

Had Bierce never produced anything but these prose tales, his right to a place high in American letters would nevertheless be secure, and of all his work, serious or otherwise, here is his greatest claim to popular and permanent recognition. No stories for which the Civil War has furnished such dramatic setting surpass these masterpieces of short fiction, either in power of description, subtlety of touch or literary finish. It is deeply to be regretted that he has not given us more such prose.

A Son of the Gods

A breezy day and a sunny landscape. An open country to right and left and forward; behind, a wood. In the edge of this wood, facing the open but not venturing into it, long lines of troops halted. The wood is alive with them, and full of confused noises: the occasional rattle of wheels as a battery of artillery goes into position to cover the advance; the hum and murmur of the soldiers talking; a sound of innumerable feet in the dry leaves that strew the interspaces among the trees; hoarse commands of officers. Detached groups of horsemen are well in front - not

altogether exposed - many of them intently regarding the crest of a hill a mile away in the direction of the interrupted advance. For this powerful army, moving in battle order through a forest, has met with a formidable obstacle - the open country. The crest of that gentle hill a mile away has a sinister look; it says, Beware! Along it runs a stone wall extending to left and right a great distance. Behind the wall is a hedge; behind the hedge are seen the tops of trees in rather straggling order. Among the trees - what? It is necessary to know.

Yesterday, and for many days and nights previously, we were fighting somewhere; always there was cannonading, with occasional keen rattlings of musketry, mingled with cheers, our own or the enemy's, we seldom knew, attesting some temporary advantage. This morning at daybreak the enemy was gone. We have moved forward across his earthworks, across which we have so often vainly attempted to move before, through the debris of his abandoned camps, among the graves of his fallen, into the woods beyond.

How curiously we regarded everything! How odd it all seemed! Nothing appeared quite familiar; the most commonplace objects - an old saddle, a splintered wheel, a forgotten canteen everything related something of the mysterious personality of those strange men who had been killing us. The soldier never becomes wholly familiar with the conception of his foes as men like himself; he cannot divest himself of the feeling that they are another order of beings, differently conditioned, in an environment not altogether of the earth. The smallest vestiges of them rivet his attention and engage his interest. He thinks of them as inaccessible; and, catching an unexpected glimpse of them, they appear farther away, and therefore larger, than they really are - like objects in a fog. He is somewhat in awe of them.

From the edge of the wood leading up the acclivity are the tracks of horses and wheels - the wheels of cannon. The yellow grass is beaten down by the feet of infantry. Clearly they have passed this way in thousands; they have not withdrawn by the country roads. This is significant - it is the difference between retiring and retreating.

That group of horsemen is our commander, his staff, and escort. He is facing the distant crest, holding his field-glass against his eyes with both hands, his elbows needlessly elevated. It is a fashion; it seems to dignify the act; we are all addicted to it. Suddenly he lowers the glass and says a few words to those about him. Two or three aides detach themselves from the group and canter away into the woods, along the lines in each direction. We did not hear his words, but we knew them: "Tell General X. to send forward the skirmish line." Those of us who have been out of place resume our positions; the men resting at ease straighten themselves, and the ranks are reformed without a command. Some of us staff officers dismount and look at our saddle-girths; those already on the ground re-

mount.

Galloping rapidly along in the edge of the open ground comes a young officer on a snow-white horse. His saddle-blanket is scarlet. What a fool! No one who has ever been in battle but remembers how naturally every rifle turns toward the man on a white horse; no one but has observed how a bit of red enrages the bull of battle. That such colors are fashionable in military life must be accepted as the most astonishing of all the phenomena of human vanity. They would seem to have been devised to increase the death-rate.

This young officer is in full uniform, as if on parade. He is all agleam with bullion, a blue-and-gold edition of the Poetry of War. A wave of derisive laughter runs abreast of him all along the line. But how handsome he is! With what careless grace he sits his horse!

He reins up within a respectful distance of the corps commander and salutes. The old soldier nods familiarly; he evidently knows him. A brief colloquy between them is going on; the young man seems to be preferring some request which the elder one is indisposed to grant. Let us ride a little nearer. Ah! too late - it is ended. The young officer salutes again, wheels his horse, and rides straight toward the crest of the hill. He is deadly pale.

A thin line of skirmishers, the men deployed at six paces or so apart, now pushes from the wood into the open. The commander speaks to his bugler, who claps his instrument to his lips. Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la! The skirmishers halt in their tracks.

Meantime the young horseman has advanced a hundred yards. He is riding at a walk, straight up the long slope, with never a turn of the head. How glorious! Gods! what would we not give to be in his place - with his soul! He does not draw his sabre; his right hand hangs easily at his side. The breeze catches the plume in his hat and flutters it smartly. The sunshine rests upon his shoulder-straps, lovingly, like a visible benediction. Straight on he rides. Ten thousand pairs of eyes are fixed upon him with an intensity that he can hardly fail to feel; ten thousand hearts keep quick time to the inaudible hoof-beats of his snowy steed. He is not alone - he draws all souls after him; we are but "dead men all." But we remember that we laughed! On and on, straight for the hedge-lined wall, he rides. Not a look backward. Oh, if he would but turn - if he could but see the love, the adoration, the atonement!

Not a word is spoken; the populous depths of the forest still murmur with their unseen and unseeing swarm, but all along the fringe there is silence absolute. The burly commander is an equestrian statue of himself. The mounted staff officers, their field-glasses up, are motionless all. The line of battle in the edge of the wood stands at a new kind of "attention," each man in the attitude in which he was caught by the consciousness of what is going on. All these hardened and im-

penitent man-killers, to whom death in its awfulest forms is a fact familiar to their every-day observation; who sleep on hills trembling with the thunder of great guns, dine in the midst of streaming missiles, and play at cards among the dead faces of their dearest friends, - all are watching with suspended breath and beating hearts the outcome of an act involving the life of one man. Such is the magnetism of courage and devotion.

If now you should turn your head you would see a simultaneous movement among the spectators a start, as if they had received an electric shock - and looking forward again to the now distant horseman you would see that he has in that instant altered his direction and is riding at an angle to his former course. The spectators suppose the sudden deflection to be caused by a shot, perhaps a wound; but take this field-glass and you will observe that he is riding toward a break in the wall and hedge. He means, if not killed, to ride through and overlook the country beyond.

You are not to forget the nature of this man's act; it is not permitted to you to think of it as an instance of bravado, nor, on the other hand, a needless sacrifice of self. If the enemy has not retreated, he is in force on that ridge. The investigator will encounter nothing less than a line of battle; there is no need of pickets, videttes, skirmishers, to give warning of our approach; our attacking lines will be visible, conspicuous, exposed to an artillery fire that will shave the ground the moment they break from cover, and for half the distance to a sheet of rifle bullets in which nothing can live. In short, if the enemy is there, it would be madness to attack him in front; he must be maneuvered out by the immemorial plan of threatening his line of communication, as necessary to his existence as to the diver at the bottom of the sea his air-tube. But how ascertain if the enemy is there? There is but one way: somebody must go and see. The natural and customary thing to do is to send forward a line of skirmishers. But in this case they will answer in the affirmative with all their lives; the enemy, crouching in double ranks behind the stone wall and in cover of the hedge, will wait until it is possible to count each assailant's teeth. At the first volley a half of the questioning line will fall, the other half before it can accomplish the predestined retreat. What a price to pay for gratified curiosity! At what a dear rate an army must sometimes purchase knowledge! "Let me pay all," says this gallant man - this military Christ!

There is no hope except the hope against hope that the crest is clear. True, he might prefer capture to death. So long as he advances, the line will not fire, - why should it? He can safely ride into the hostile ranks and become a prisoner of war. But this would defeat his object. It would not answer our question; it is necessary either that he return unharmed or be shot to death before our eyes. Only so shall we know how to act. If captured - why, that might have been done by a half-dozen stragglers.

Now begins an extraordinary contest of intellect between a man and an army. Our horseman, now within a quarter of a mile of the crest, suddenly wheels to the left and gallops in a direction parallel to it. He has caught sight of his antagonist; he knows all. Some slight advantage of ground has enabled him to overlook a part of the line. If he were here, he could tell us in words. But that is now hopeless; he must make the best use of the few minutes of life remaining to him, by compelling the enemy himself to tell us as much and as plainly as possible - which, naturally, that discreet power is reluctant to do. Not a rifleman in those crouching ranks, not a cannoneer at those masked and shotted guns, but knows the needs of the situation, the imperative duty of forbearance. Besides, there has been time enough to forbid them all to fire. True, a single rifle-shot might drop him and be no great disclosure. But firing is infectious - and see how rapidly he moves, with never a pause except as he whirls his horse about to take a new direction, never directly backward toward us, never directly forward toward his executioners. All this is visible through the glass; it seems occurring within pistol-shot; we see all but the enemy, whose presence, whose thoughts, whose motives we infer. To the unaided eye there is nothing but a black figure on a white horse, tracing slow zigzags against the slope of a distant hill - so slowly they seem almost to creep.

Now - the glass again - he has tired of his failure, or sees his error, or has gone mad; he is dashing directly forward at the wall, as if to take it at a leap, hedge and all! One moment only and he wheels right about and is speeding like the wind straight down the slope - toward his friends, toward his death! Instantly the wall is topped with a fierce roll of smoke for a distance of hundreds of yards to, right and left. This is as instantly dissipated by the wind, and before the rattle of the rifles reaches us, he is down. No, he recovers his seat; he has but pulled his horse upon its haunches. They are up and away! A tremendous cheer bursts from our ranks, relieving the insupportable tension of our feelings. And the horse and its rider? Yes, they are up and away. Away, indeed - they are making directly to our left, parallel to the now steadily blazing and smoking wall. The rattle of the musketry is continuous, and every bullet's target is that courageous heart.

Suddenly a great bank of white smoke pushes upward from behind the wall. Another and another - a dozen roll up before the thunder of the explosions and the humming of the missiles reach our ears, and the missiles themselves come bounding through clouds of dust into our covert, knocking over here and there a man and causing a temporary distraction, a passing thought of self.

The dust drifts away. Incredible! - that enchanted horse and rider have passed a ravine and are climbing another slope to unveil another conspiracy of silence, to thwart the will of another armed host. Another moment and that crest too is in eruption. The horse rears and strikes the air with its forefeet. They are down at last. But look again - the man has detached himself from the dead animal.

He stands erect, motionless, holding his sabre in his right hand straight above his head. His face is toward us. Now he lowers his hand to a level with his face and moves it outward, the blade of the sabre describing a downward curve. It is a sign to us, to the world, to posterity. It is a hero's salute to death and history.

Again the spell is broken; our men attempt to cheer; they are choking with emotion; they utter hoarse, discordant cries; they clutch their weapons and press tumultuously forward into the open. The skirmishers, without orders, against orders, are going forward at a keen run, like hounds unleashed. Our cannon speak and the enemy's now open in full chorus; to right and left as far as we can see, the distant crest, seeming now so near, erects its towers of cloud, and the great shot pitch roaring down among our moving masses. Flag after flag of ours emerges from the wood, line after line sweeps forth, catching the sunlight on its burnished arms. The rear battalions alone are in obedience; they preserve their proper distance from the insurgent front.

The commander has not moved. He now removes his field-glass from his eyes and glances to the right and left. He sees the human current flowing on either side of him and his huddled escort, like tide waves parted by a rock. Not a sign of feeling in his face; he is thinking. Again he directs his eyes forward; they slowly traverse that malign and awful crest. He addresses a calm word to his bugler. Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la! The injunction has an imperiousness which enforces it. It is repeated by all the bugles of all the subordinate commanders; the sharp metallic notes assert themselves above the hum of the advance, and penetrate the sound of the cannon. To halt is to withdraw. The colors move slowly back, the lines face about and sullenly follow, bearing their wounded; the skirmishers return, gathering up the dead.

Ah, those many, many needless dead! That great soul whose beautiful body is lying over yonder, so conspicuous against the sere hillside - could it not have been spared the bitter consciousness of a vain devotion? Would one exception have marred too much the pitiless perfection of the divine, eternal plan?

A Horseman in the Sky

One sunny afternoon in the autumn of the year 1861, a soldier lay in a clump of laurel by the side of a road in Western Virginia. He lay at full length, upon his stomach, his feet resting upon the toes, his head upon the left forearm. His extended right hand loosely grasped his rifle. But for the somewhat methodical disposition of his limbs and a slight rhythmic movement of the cartridge-box at the back of his belt, he might have been thought to be dead. He was asleep at his post of duty. But if detected he would be dead shortly afterward, that being the just and legal penalty of his crime.

The clump of laurel in which the criminal lay was in the angle of a road

which, after, ascending, southward, a steep acclivity to that point, turned sharply to the west, running along the summit for perhaps one hundred yards. There it turned southward again and went zigzagging downward through the forest. At the salient of that second angle was a large flat rock, jutting out northward, overlooking the deep valley from which the road ascended. The rock capped a high cliff; a stone dropped from its outer edge would have fallen sheer downward one thousand feet to the tops of the pines. The angle where the soldier lay was on another spur of the same cliff. Had he been awake, he would have commanded a view, not only of the short arm of the road and the jutting rock, but of the entire profile of the cliff below it. It might well have made him giddy to look.

The country was wooded everywhere except at the bottom of the valley to the northward, where there was a small natural meadow, through which flowed a stream scarcely visible from the valley's rim. This open ground looked hardly larger than an ordinary dooryard, but was really several acres in extent. Its green was more vivid than that of the inclosing forest. Away beyond it rose a line of giant cliffs similar to those upon which we are supposed to stand in our survey of the savage scene, and through which the road had some how made its climb to the summit. The configuration of the valley, indeed, was such that from this point of observation it seemed entirely shut in, and one could not but have wondered how the road which found a way out of it had found a way into it, and whence came and whither went the waters of the stream that parted the meadow two thousand feet below.

No country is so wild and difficult but men will make it a theater of war; concealed in the forest at the bottom of that military rat-trap, in which half a hundred men in possession of the exits might have starved an army to submission, lay five regiments of Federal infantry. They had marched all the previous day and night, and were resting. At nightfall they would take to the road again, climb to the place where their unfaithful sentinel now slept, and, descending the other slope of the ridge, fall upon a camp of the enemy at about midnight. Their hope was to surprise it, for the road led to the rear of it. In case of failure, their position would be perilous in the extreme; and fail they surely would, should accident or vigilance apprise the enemy of the movement.

The sleeping sentinel in the clump of laurel was a young Virginian named Carter Druse. He was the son of wealthy parents, an only child, and had known such ease and cultivation and high living as wealth and taste were able to command in the mountain country of Western Virginia. His home was but a few miles from where he now lay. One morning he had risen from the breakfast table and said, quietly but gravely: "Father, a Union regiment has arrived at Grafton. I am going to join it."

The father lifted his leonine head, looked at the son a moment in silence,

and replied: "Well, go, sir, and, whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty. Virginia, to which you are a traitor, must get on without you. Should we both live to the end of the war, we will speak further of the matter. Your mother, as the physician has informed you, is in a most critical condition; at the best, she cannot be with us longer than a few weeks, but that time is precious. It would be better not to disturb her."

So Carter Druse, bowing reverently to his father, who returned the salute with a stately courtesy which masked a breaking heart, left the home of his childhood to go soldiering. By conscience and courage, by deeds of devotion and daring, he soon commended himself to his fellows and his officers; and it was to these qualities and to some knowledge of the country that he owed his selection for his present perilous duty at the extreme outpost. Nevertheless, fatigue had been stronger than resolution, and he had fallen asleep. What good or bad angel came in a dream to rouse him from his state of crime, who shall say? Without a movement, without a sound, in the profound silence and the languor of the late afternoon, some invisible messenger of fate touched with unsealing finger the eyes of his consciousness - whispered into the ear of his spirit the mysterious awakening word which no human lips ever have spoken, no human memory ever has recalled. He quietly raised his forehead from his arm and looked between the masking stems of the laurels, instinctively closing his right hand about the stock of his rifle.

His first feeling was a keen artistic delight. On a colossal pedestal, the cliff, - motionless at the extreme edge of the capping rock and sharply outlined against the sky, - was an equestrian statue of impressive dignity. The figure of the man sat the figure of the horse, straight and soldierly, but with the repose of a Grecian god carted in the marble which limits the suggestion of activity. The gray costume harmonized with its aerial background; the metal of accoutrement and caparison was softened and subdued by the shadow; the animal's skin had no points of high light. A carbine, strikingly foreshortened, lay across the pommel of the saddle, kept in place by the right hand grasping it at the "grip"; the left hand, holding the bridle rein, was invisible. In silhouette against the sky, the profile of the horse was cut with the sharpness of a cameo; it looked across the heights of air to the confronting cliffs beyond. The face of the rider, turned slightly away, showed only an outline of temple and beard; he was looking downward to the bottom of the valley. Magnified by its lift against the sky and by the soldier's testifying sense of the formidableness of a near enemy, the group appeared of heroic, almost colossal, size.

For an instant Druse had a strange, half-defined feeling that he had slept to the end of the war and was looking upon a noble work of art reared upon that commanding eminence to commemorate the deeds of an heroic past of which he had been an inglorious part. The feeling was dispelled by a slight movement of the group: the horse, without moving its feet, had drawn its body slightly back-

ward from the verge; the man remained immobile as before. Broad awake and keenly alive to the significance of the situation, Druse now brought the butt of his rifle against his cheek by cautiously pushing the barrel forward through the bushes, cocked the piece, and, glancing through the sights, covered a vital spot of the horseman's breast. A touch upon the trigger and all would have been well with Carter Druse. At that instant the horseman turned his head and looked in the direction of his concealed foeman -seemed to look into his very face, into his eyes, into his brave, compassionate heart.

Is it, then, so terrible to kill an enemy in war - an enemy who has surprised a secret vital to the safety of one's self and comrades - an enemy more formidable for his knowledge than all his army for its numbers? Carter Druse grew pale; he shook in every limb, turned faint, and saw the statuesque group before him as black figures, rising, falling, moving unsteadily in arcs of circles in a fiery sky. His hand fell away from his weapon, his head slowly dropped until his face rested on the leaves in which he lay. This courageous gentleman and hardy soldier was near swooning from intensity of emotion.

It was not for long; in another moment his face was raised from earth, his hands resumed their places on the rifle, his forefinger sought the trigger; mind, heart and eyes were clear, conscience and reason sound. He could not hope to capture that enemy; to alarm him would but send him dashing to his camp with his fatal news. The duty of the soldier was plain: the man must be shot dead from ambush - without warning, without a moment's spiritual preparation, with never so much as an unspoken prayer, he must be sent to his account. But no - there is a hope; he may have discovered nothing; perhaps he is but admiring the sublimity of the landscape. If permitted, he may turn and ride carelessly away in the direction whence he came. Surely it will be possible to judge at the instant of his withdrawing whether he knows. It may well be that his fixity of attention - Druse turned his head and looked through the deeps of air downward as from the surface of the bottom of a translucent sea. He saw creeping across the green meadow a sinuous line of figures of men and horses - some foolish commander was permitting the soldiers of his escort to water their beasts in the open, in plain view from a hundred summits!

Druse withdrew his eyes from the valley and fixed them again upon the group of man and horse in the sky, and again it was through the sights of his rifle. But this time his aim was at the horse. In his memory, as if they were a divine mandate, rang the words of his father at their parting: "Whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty." He was calm now. His teeth were firmly but not rigidly closed; his nerves were as tranquil as a sleeping babe's - not a tremor affected any muscle of his body; his breathing, until suspended in the act of taking aim, was regular and slow. Duty had conquered; the spirit had said to the body: "Peace, be still." He fired.

An officer of the Federal force, who, in a spirit of adventure or in quest of knowledge, had left the hidden bivouac in the valley, and, with aimless feet, had made his way to the lower edge of a small open space near the foot of the cliff, was considering what he had to gain by pushing his exploration further. At a distance of a quarter-mile before him, but apparently at a stone's throw, rose from its fringe of pines the gigantic face of rock, towering to so great a height above him that it made him giddy to look up to where its edge cut a sharp, rugged line against the sky. At some distance away to his right it presented a clean, vertical profile against a background of blue sky to a point half the way down, and of distant hills hardly less blue, thence to the tops of the trees at its base. Lifting his eyes to the dizzy altitude of its summit, the officer saw an astonishing sight - a man on horseback riding down into the valley through the air!

Straight upright sat the rider, in military fashion, with a firm seat in the saddle, a strong clutch upon the rein to hold his charger from too impetuous a plunge. From his bare head his long hair streamed upward, waving like a plume. His hands were concealed in the cloud of the horse's lifted mane. The animal's body was as level as if every hoof-stroke encountered the resistant earth. Its motions were those of a wild gallop, but even as the officer looked they ceased, with all the legs thrown sharply forward as in the act of alighting from a leap. But this was a flight!

Filled with amazement and terror by this apparition of a horseman in the sky-half believing himself the chosen scribe of some new apocalypse, the officer was overcome by the intensity of his emotions; his legs failed him and he fell. Almost at the same instant he heard a crashing sound in the trees - a sound that died without an echo - and all was still.

The officer rose to his feet, trembling. The familiar sensation of an abraded shin recalled his dazed faculties. Pulling himself together, he ran obliquely away from the cliff to a point distant from its foot; thereabout he expected to find his man; and thereabout he naturally failed. In the fleeting instant of his vision his imagination had been so wrought upon by the apparent grace and ease and intention of the marvelous performance that it did not occur to him that the line of march of aerial cavalry is directly downward, and that he could find the objects of his search at the very foot of the cliff. A half-hour later he returned to camp.

This officer was a wise man; he knew better than to tell an incredible truth. He said nothing of what he had seen. But when the commander asked him if in his scout he had learned anything of advantage to the expedition, he answered:

"Yes, sir; there is no road leading down into this valley from the southward."

The commander, knowing better, smiled.

After firing his shot, Private Carter Druse reloaded his rifle and resumed his watch. Ten minutes had hardly passed when a Federal sergeant crept cautiously to him on hands and knees. Druse neither turned his head nor looked at

him, but lay without motion or sign of recognition.

"Did you fire?" the sergeant whispered.

"At what?"

"A horse. It was standing on yonder rock-pretty far out. You see it is no longer there. It went over the cliff."

The man's face was white, but he showed no other sign of emotion. Having answered, he turned away his eyes and said no more. The sergeant did not understand.

"See here, Druse," he said, after a moment's silence, "it's no use making a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anybody on the horse?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"My father."

The sergeant rose to his feet and walked away. "Good God!" he said.

HUNTER PATROL

Many men have dreamed of world peace, but none have been able to achieve it. If one man did have that power, could mankind afford to pay the price?

At the crest of the ridge, Benson stopped for an instant, glancing first at his wrist-watch and then back over his shoulder. It was 0539; the barrage was due in eleven minutes, at the spot where he was now standing. Behind, on the long north-east slope, he could see the columns of black oil smoke rising from what had been the Pan-Soviet advance supply dump. There was a great deal of firing going on, back there; he wondered if the Commies had managed to corner a few of his men, after the patrol had accomplished its mission and scattered, or if a couple of Communist units were shooting each other up in mutual mistaken identity. The result would be about the same in either case—reserve units would be disorganized, and some men would have been pulled back from the front line. His dozen-odd UN regulars and Turkish partisans had done their best to simulate a paratroop attack in force. At least, his job was done; now to execute that classic infantry maneuver described as, "Let's get the hell outa here." This was his last patrol before rotation home. He didn't want anything unfortunate to happen.

There was a little ravine to the left; the stream which had cut it in the steep southern slope of the ridge would be dry at this time of year, and he could make better time, and find protection in it from any chance shots when the interdictory barrage started. He hurried toward it and followed it down to the valley that would lead toward the front—the thinly-held section of the Communist lines, and the UN lines beyond, where fresh troops were waiting to jump from their holes and begin the attack.

There was something wrong about this ravine, though. At first, it was only a vague presentiment, growing stronger as he followed the dry gully down to the valley below. Something he had smelled, or heard, or seen, without conscious recognition. Then, in the dry sand where the ravine debouched into the valley, he saw faint tank-tracks—only one pair. There was something wrong about the vines that mantled one side of the ravine, too....

An instant later, he was diving to the right, breaking his fall with the butt of his auto-carbine, rolling rapidly toward the cover of a rock, and as he did so, the thinking part of his mind recognized what was wrong. The tank-tracks had ended against the vine-grown side of the ravine, what he had smelled had been lubricating oil and petrol, and the leaves on some of the vines hung upside down.

Almost at once, from behind the vines, a tank's machine guns snarled at him, clipping the place where he had been standing, then shifting to rage against the sheltering rock. With a sudden motor-roar, the muzzle of a long tank-gun pushed out through the vines, and then the low body of a tank with a red star on the turret came rumbling out of the camouflaged bay. The machine guns kept him pinned behind the rock; the tank swerved ever so slightly so that its wide left tread was aimed directly at him, then picked up speed. Aren't even going to waste a shell on me, he thought.

Futilely, he let go a clip from his carbine, trying to hit one of the vision-slits; then rolled to one side, dropped out the clip, slapped in another. There was a shimmering blue mist around him. If he only hadn't used his last grenade, back there at the supply-dump....

The strange blue mist became a flickering radiance that ran through all the colors of the spectrum and became an utter, impenetrable blackness....

There were voices in the blackness, and a softness under him, but under his back, when he had been lying on his stomach, as though he were now on a comfortable bed. They got me alive, he thought; now comes the brainwashing!

He cracked one eye open imperceptibly. Lights, white and glaring, from a ceiling far above; walls as white as the lights. Without moving his head, he opened both eyes and shifted them from right to left. Vaguely, he could see people and, behind them, machines so simply designed that their functions were unguessable. He sat up and looked around groggily. The people, their costumes—definitely not Pan-Soviet uniforms—and the room and its machines, told him nothing. The hardness under his right hip was a welcome surprise; they hadn't taken his pistol from him! Feigning even more puzzlement and weakness, he clutched his knees with his elbows and leaned his head forward on them, trying to collect his thoughts.

"We shall have to give up, Gregory," a voice trembled with disappointment.

"Why, Anthony?" The new voice was deeper, more aggressive.

"Look. Another typical reaction; retreat to the foetus."

Footsteps approached. Another voice, discouragement heavily weighting each syllable: "You're right. He's like all the others. We'll have to send him back."

"And look for no more?" The voice he recognized as Anthony faltered between question and statement.

A babel of voices, in dispute; then, clearly, the voice Benson had come to

label as Gregory, cut in:

"I will never give up!"

He raised his head; there was something in the timbre of that voice reminding him of his own feelings in the dark days when the UN had everywhere been reeling back under the Pan-Soviet hammer-blows.

"Anthony!" Gregory's voice again; Benson saw the speaker; short, stocky, gray-haired, stubborn lines about the mouth. The face of a man chasing an illusive but not uncapturable dream.

"That means nothing." A tall thin man, too lean for the tunic-like garment he wore, was shaking his head.

Deliberately, trying to remember his college courses in psychology, he forced himself to accept, and to assess, what he saw as reality. He was on a small table, like an operating table; the whole place looked like a medical lab or a clinic. He was still in uniform; his boots had soiled the white sheets with the dust of Armenia. He had all his equipment, including his pistol and combat-knife; his carbine was gone, however. He could feel the weight of his helmet on his head. The room still rocked and swayed a little, but the faces of the people were coming into focus.

He counted them, saying each number to himself: one, two, three, four, five men; one woman. He swung his feet over the edge of the table, being careful that it would be between him and the others when he rose, and began inching his right hand toward his right hip, using his left hand, on his brow, to misdirect attention.

"I would classify his actions as arising from conscious effort at cortico-thalamic integration," the woman said, like an archaeologist who has just found a K-ration tin at the bottom of a neolithic kitchen-midden. She had the peculiarly young-old look of the spinster teachers with whom Benson had worked before going to the war.

"I want to believe it, but I'm afraid to," another man for whom Benson had no name-association said. He was portly, gray-haired, arrogant-faced; he wore a short black jacket with a jewelled zipper-pull, and striped trousers.

Benson cleared his throat. "Just who are you people?" he inquired. "And just where am I?"

Anthony grabbed Gregory's hand and pumped it frantically.

"I've dreamed of the day when I could say this!" he cried. "Congratulations, Gregory!"

That touched off another bedlam, of joy, this time, instead of despair. Benson hid his amusement at the facility with which all of them were discovering in one another the courage, vision and stamina of true patriots and pioneers. He let it go

on for a few moments, hoping to glean some clue. Finally, he interrupted.

"I believe I asked a couple of questions," he said, using the voice he reserved for sergeants and second lieutenants. "I hate to break up this mutual admiration session, but I would appreciate some answers. This isn't anything like the situation I last remember...."

"He remembers!" Gregory exclaimed. "That confirms your first derivation by symbolic logic, and it strengthens the validity of the second...."

The schoolteacherish woman began jabbering excitedly; she ran through about a paragraph of what was pure gobbledegook to Benson, before the man with the arrogant face and the jewelled zipper-pull broke in on her.

"Save that for later, Paula," he barked. "I'd be very much interested in your theories about why memories are unimpaired when you time-jump forward and lost when you reverse the process, but let's stick to business. We have what we wanted; now let's use what we have."

"I never liked the way you made your money," a dark-faced, cadaverous man said, "but when you talk, it makes sense. Let's get on with it."

Benson used the brief silence which followed to study the six. With the exception of the two who had just spoken, there was the indefinable mark of the fanatic upon all of them—people fanatical about different things, united for different reasons in a single purpose. It reminded him sharply of some teachers' committee about to beard a school-board with an unpopular and expensive recommendation.

Anthony—the oldest of the lot, in a knee-length tunic—turned to Gregory.

"I believe you had better...." he began.

"As to who we are, we'll explain that, partially, later. As for your question, 'Where am I?' that will have to be rephrased. If you ask, 'When and where am I?' I can furnish a rational answer. In the temporal dimension, you are fifty years futureward of the day of your death; spatially, you are about eight thousand miles from the place of your death, in what is now the World Capitol, St. Louis."

Nothing in the answer made sense but the name of the city. Benson chuckled.

"What happened; the Cardinals conquer the world? I knew they had a good team, but I didn't think it was that good."

"No, no," Gregory told him earnestly. "The government isn't a theocracy. At least not yet. But if The Guide keeps on insisting that only beautiful things are good and that he is uniquely qualified to define beauty, watch his rule change into just that."

"I've been detecting symptoms of religious paranoia, messianic delusions, about his public statements...." the woman began.

"Idolatry!" another member of the group, who wore a black coat fastened to the neck, and white neck-bands, rasped. "Idolatry in deed, as well as in spirit!"

The sense of unreality, partially dispelled, began to return. Benson dropped to the floor and stood beside the table, getting a cigarette out of his pocket and lighting it.

"I made a joke," he said, putting his lighter away. "The fact that none of you got it has done more to prove that I am fifty years in the future than anything any of you could say." He went on to explain who the St. Louis Cardinals were.

"Yes; I remember! Baseball!" Anthony exclaimed. "There is no baseball, now. The Guide will not allow competitive sports; he says that they foster the spirit of violence...."

The cadaverous man in the blue jacket turned to the man in the black garment of similar cut.

"You probably know more history than any of us," he said, getting a cigar out of his pocket and lighting it. He lighted it by rubbing the end on the sole of his shoe. "Suppose you tell him what the score is." He turned to Benson. "You can rely on his dates and happenings; his interpretation's strictly capitalist, of course," he said.

Black-jacket shook his head. "You first, Gregory," he said. "Tell him how he got here, and then I'll tell him why."

"I believe," Gregory began, "that in your period, fiction writers made some use of the subject of time-travel. It was not, however, given serious consideration, largely because of certain alleged paradoxes involved, and because of an elementalistic and objectifying attitude toward the whole subject of time. I won't go into the mathematics and symbolic logic involved, but we have disposed of the objections; more, we have succeeded in constructing a time-machine, if you want to call it that. We prefer to call it a temporal-spatial displacement field generator."

"It's really very simple," the woman called Paula interrupted. "If the universe is expanding, time is a widening spiral; if contracting, a diminishing spiral; if static, a uniform spiral. The possibility of pulsation was our only worry...."

"That's no worry," Gregory reproved her. "I showed you that the rate was too slow to have an effect on...."

"Oh, nonsense; you can measure something which exists within a microsecond, but where is the instrument to measure a temporal pulsation that may require years...? You haven't come to that yet."

"Be quiet, both of you!" the man with the black coat and the white bands commanded. "While you argue about vanities, thousands are being converted to the godlessness of The Guide, and other thousands of his dupes are dying, unpre-

pared to face their Maker!''

''All right, you invented a time-machine,'' Benson said. ''In civvies, I was only a high school chemistry teacher. I can tell a class of juniors the difference between H{2}O and H{2}SO{4}, but the theory of time-travel is wasted on me.... Suppose you just let me ask the questions; then I'll be sure of finding out what I don't know. For instance, who won the war I was fighting in, before you grabbed me and brought me here? The Commies?''

''No, the United Nations,'' Anthony told him. ''At least, they were the least exhausted when both sides decided to quit.''

''Then what's this dictatorship.... The Guide? Extreme Rightist?''

''Walter, you'd better tell him,'' Gregory said.

''We damn near lost the war,'' the man in the black jacket and striped trousers said, ''but for once, we won the peace. The Soviet Bloc was broken up—India, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, the Ukraine, all the Satellite States. Most of them turned into little dictatorships, like the Latin American countries after the liberation from Spain, but they were personal, non-ideological, generally benevolent, dictatorships, the kind that can grow into democracies, if they're given time.''

''Capitalistic dictatorships, he means,'' the cadaverous man in the blue jacket explained.

''Be quiet, Carl,'' Anthony told him. ''Let's not confuse this with any class-struggle stuff.''

''Actually, the United Nations rules the world,'' Walter continued. ''What goes on in the Ukraine or Latvia or Manchuria is about analogous to what went on under the old United States government in, let's say, Tammany-ruled New York. But here's the catch. The UN is ruled absolutely by one man.''

''How could that happen? In my time, the UN had its functions so subdivided and compartmented that it couldn't even run a war properly. Our army commanders were making war by systematic disobedience.''

''The charter was changed shortly after ... er, that is, after....'' Walter was fumbling for words.

''After my death.'' Benson finished politely. ''Go on. Even with a changed charter, how did one man get all the powers into his hands?''

''By sorcery!'' black-coat-and-white-bands fairly shouted. ''By the help of his master, Satan!''

''You know, there are times when some such theory tempts me,'' Paula said.

''He was a big moneybags,'' Carl said. ''He bribed his way in. See, New York was bombed flat. Where the old UN buildings were, it's still hot. So The Guide donated a big tract of land outside St. Louis, built these buildings—we're in the basement of one of them, right now, if you want a good laugh—and before long,

he had the whole organization eating out of his hand. They just voted him into power, and the world into slavery."

Benson looked around at the others, who were nodding in varying degrees of agreement.

"Substantially, that's it. He managed to convince everybody of his altruism, integrity and wisdom," Walter said. "It was almost blasphemous to say anything against him. I really don't understand how it happened...."

"Well, what's he been doing with his power?" Benson asked. "Wise things, or stupid ones?"

"I could be general, and say that he has deprived all of us of our political and other liberties. It is best to be specific," Anthony said. "Gregory?"

"My own field—dimensional physics—hasn't been interfered with much, yet. It's different in other fields. For instance, all research in sonics has been arbitrarily stopped. So has a great deal of work in organic and synthetic chemistry. Psychology is a madhouse of ... what was the old word, licentiousness? No, lysenkoism. Medicine and surgery—well, there's a huge program of compulsory sterilization, and another one of eugenic marriage-control. And infants who don't conform to certain physical standards don't survive. Neither do people who have disfiguring accidents beyond the power of plastic surgery."

Paula spoke next. "My field is child welfare. Well, I'm going to show you an audio-visual of an interesting ceremony in a Hindu village, derived from the ancient custom of the suttee. It is the Hindu method of conforming to The Guide's demand that only beautiful children be allowed to grow to maturity."

The film was mercifully brief. Even in spite of the drums and gongs, and the chanting of the crowd, Benson found out how loudly a newborn infant can scream in a fire. The others looked as though they were going to be sick; he doubted if he looked much better.

"Of course, we are a more practical and mechanical-minded people, here and in Europe," Paula added, holding down her gorge by main strength. "We have lethal-gas chambers that even Hitler would have envied."

"I am a musician," Anthony said. "A composer. If Gregory thinks that the sciences are controlled, he should try to write even the simplest piece of music. The extent of censorship and control over all the arts, and especially music, is incredible." He coughed slightly. "And I have another motive, a more selfish one. I am approaching the compulsory retirement age; I will soon be invited to go to one of the Havens. Even though these Havens are located in the most barren places, they are beauty-spots, verdant beyond belief. It is of only passing interest that, while large numbers of the aged go there yearly, their populations remain constant, and, to judge from the quantities of supplies shipped to them, extremely small."

"They call me Samuel, in this organization," the man in the long black coat said. "Whoever gave me that alias must have chosen it because I am here in an effort to live up to it. Although I am ordained by no church, I fight for all of them. The plain fact is that this man we call The Guide is really the Antichrist!"

"Well, I haven't quite so lofty a motive, but it's good enough to make me willing to finance this project," Walter said. "It's very simple. The Guide won't let people make money, and if they do, he taxes it away from them. And he has laws to prohibit inheritance; what little you can accumulate, you can't pass on to your children."

"I put up a lot of the money, too, don't forget," Carl told him. "Or the Union did; I'm a poor man, myself." He was smoking an excellent cigar, for a poor man, and his clothes could have come from the same tailor as Walter's. "Look, we got a real Union—the Union of all unions. Every working man in North America, Europe, Australia and South Africa belongs to it. And The Guide has us all hog-tied."

"He won't let you strike," Benson chuckled.

"That's right. And what can we do? Why, we can't even make our closed-shop contracts stick. And as far as getting anything like a pay-raise...."

"Good thing. Another pay-raise in some of my companies would bankrupt them, the way The Guide has us under his thumb...." Walter began, but he was cut off.

"Well! It seems as though this Guide has done some good, if he's made you two realize that you're both on the same side, and that what hurts one hurts both," Benson said. "When I shipped out for Turkey in '77, neither Labor nor Management had learned that." He looked from one to another of them. "The Guide must have a really good bodyguard, with all the enemies he's made."

Gregory shook his head. "He lives virtually alone, in a very small house on the UN Capitol grounds. In fact, except for a small police-force, armed only with non-lethal stun-guns, your profession of arms is non-existent."

"I've been guessing what you want me to do," Benson said. "You want this Guide bumped off. But why can't any of you do it? Or, if it's too risky, at least somebody from your own time? Why me?"

"We can't. Everybody in the world today is conditioned against violence, especially the taking of human life," Anthony told him.

"Now, wait a moment!" This time, he was using the voice he would have employed in chiding a couple of Anatolian peasant partisans who were field-stripping a machine gun the wrong way. "Those babies in that film you showed me weren't dying of old age...."

"That is not violence," Paula said bitterly. "That is humane beneficence. Ugly people would be unhappy, and would make others unhappy, in a world where everybody else is beautiful."

"And all these oppressive and tyrannical laws," Benson continued. "How does he enforce them, without violence, actual or threatened?"

Samuel started to say something about the Power of the Evil One; Paula, ignoring him, said:

"I really don't know; he just does it. Mass hypnotism of some sort. I know music has something to do with it, because there is always music, everywhere. This laboratory, for instance, was secretly soundproofed; we couldn't have worked here, otherwise."

"All right. I can see that you'd need somebody from the past, preferably a soldier, whose conditioning has been in favor rather than against violence. I'm not the only one you snatched, I take it?"

"No. We've been using that machine to pick up men from battlefields all over the world and all over history," Gregory said. "Until now, none of them could adjust.... Uggh!" He shuddered, looking even sicker than when the film was being shown.

"He's thinking," Walter said, "about a French officer from Waterloo who blew out his brains with a pocket-pistol on that table, and an English archer from Agincourt who ran amok with a dagger in here, and a trooper of the Seventh Cavalry from the Custer Massacre."

Gregory managed to overcome his revulsion. "You see, we were forced to take our subjects largely at random with regard to individual characteristics, mental attitudes, adaptability, et cetera." As long as he stuck to high order abstractions, he could control himself. "Aside from their professional lack of repugnance for violence, we took soldiers from battlefields because we could select men facing immediate death, whose removal from the past would not have any effect upon the casual chain of events affecting the present."

A warning buzzer rasped in Benson's brain. He nodded, poker-faced.

"I can see that," he agreed. "You wouldn't dare do anything to change the past. That was always one of the favorite paradoxes in time-travel fiction.... Well, I think I have the general picture. You have a dictator who is tyrannizing you; you want to get rid of him; you can't kill him yourselves. I'm opposed to dictators, myself; that—and the Selective Service law, of course—was why I was a soldier. I have no moral or psychological taboos against killing dictators, or anybody else. Suppose I cooperate with you; what's in it for me?"

There was a long silence. Walter and Carl looked at one another inquiringly; the others dithered helplessly. It was Carl who answered.

"Your return to your own time and place."

"And if I don't cooperate with you?"

"Guess when and where else we could send you," Walter said.

Benson dropped his cigarette and tramped it.

"Exactly the same time and place?" he asked.

"Well, the structure of space-time demands...." Paula began.

"The spatio-temporal displacement field is capable of identifying that spot—" Gregory pointed to a ten-foot circle in front of a bank of sleek-cabineted, dial-studded machines "—with any set of space-time coordinates in the universe. However, to avoid disruption of the structure of space-time, we must return you to approximately the same point in space-time."

Benson nodded again, this time at the confirmation of his earlier suspicion. Well, while he was alive, he still had a chance.

"All right; tell me exactly what you want me to do."

A third outbreak of bedlam, this time of relief and frantic explanation.

"Shut up, all of you!" For so thin a man, Carl had an astonishing voice. "I worked this out, so let me tell it." He turned to Benson. "Maybe I'm tougher than the rest of them, or maybe I'm not as deeply conditioned. For one thing, I'm tone-deaf. Well, here's the way it is. Gregory can set the machine to function automatically. You stand where he shows you, press the button he shows you, and fifteen seconds later it'll take you forward in time five seconds and about a kilometer in space, to The Guide's office. He'll be at his desk now. You'll have forty-five seconds to do the job, from the time the field collapses around you till it rebuilds. Then you'll be taken back to your own time again. The whole thing's automatic."

"Can do," Benson agreed. "How do I kill him?"

"I'm getting sick!" Paula murmured weakly. Her face was whiter than her gown.

"Take care of her, Samuel. Both of you'd better get out of here," Gregory said.

"The Lord of Hosts is my strength, He will.... Uggggh!" Samuel gasped.

"Conditioning's getting him, too; we gotta be quick," Carl said. "Here. This is what you'll use." He handed Benson a two-inch globe of black plastic. "Take the damn thing, quick! Little button on the side; press it, and get it out of your hand fast...." He retched. "Limited-effect bomb; everything within two-meter circle burned to nothing; outside that, great but not unendurable heat. Shut your eyes when you throw it. Flash almost blinding." He dropped his cigar and turned almost green in the face. Walter had a drink poured and handed it to him. "Uggh! Thanks, Walter." He downed it.

"Peculiar sort of thing for a non-violent people to manufacture," Benson said, looking at the bomb and then putting it in his jacket pocket.

"It isn't a weapon. Industrial; we use it in mining. I used plenty of them, in Walter's iron mines."

He nodded again. "Where do I stand, now?" he asked.

"Right over here." Gregory placed him in front of a small panel with three buttons. "Press the middle one, and step back into the small red circle and stand perfectly still while the field builds up and collapses. Face that way."

Benson drew his pistol and checked it; magazine full, a round in the chamber, safety on.

"Put that horrid thing out of sight!" Anthony gasped. "The ... the other thing ... is what you want to use."

"The bomb won't be any good if some of his guards come in before the field re-builds," Benson said.

"He has no guards. He lives absolutely alone. We told you...."

"I know you did. You probably believed it, too. I don't. And by the way, you're sending me forward. What do you do about the fact that a time-jump seems to make me pass out?"

"Here. Before you press the button, swallow it." Gregory gave him a small blue pill.

"Well, I guess that's all there is," Gregory continued. "I hope...." His face twitched, and he dropped to the floor with a thud. Carl and Walter came forward, dragged him away from the machine.

"Conditioning got him. Getting me, too," Walter said. "Hurry up, man!"

Benson swallowed the pill, pressed the button and stepped back into the red circle, drawing his pistol and snapping off the safety. The blue mist closed in on him.

This time, however, it did not thicken into blackness. It became luminous, brightening to a dazzle and dimming again to a colored mist, and then it cleared, while Benson stood at raise pistol, as though on a target range. He was facing a big desk at twenty feet, across a thick-piled blue rug. There was a man seated at the desk, a white-haired man with a mustache and a small beard, who wore a loose coat of some glossy plum-brown fabric, and a vividly blue neck-scarf.

The pistol centered on the v-shaped blue under his chin. Deliberately, Benson squeezed, recovered from the recoil, aimed, fired, recovered, aimed, fired. Five seconds gone. The old man slumped across the desk, his arms extended. Better make a good job of it, six, seven, eight seconds; he stepped forward to the edge of the desk, call that fifteen seconds, and put the muzzle to the top of the man's head, firing again and snapping on the safety. There had been something familiar about The Guide's face, but it was too late to check on that, now. There wasn't any face left; not even much head.

A box, on the desk, caught Benson's eye, a cardboard box with an envelope, stamped ***Top Secret! For the Guide Only!*** taped to it. He holstered his pistol

and caught that up, stuffing it into his pocket, in obedience to an instinct to grab anything that looked like intelligence matter while in the enemy's country. Then he stepped back to the spot where the field had deposited him. He had ten seconds to spare; somebody was banging on a door when the blue mist began to gather around him.

He was crouching, the spherical plastic object in his right hand, his thumb over the button, when the field collapsed. Sure enough, right in front of him, so close that he could smell the very heat of it, was the big tank with the red star on its turret. He cursed the sextet of sanctimonious double-crossers eight thousand miles and fifty years away in space-time. The machine guns had stopped—probably because they couldn't be depressed far enough to aim at him, now; that was a notorious fault of some of the newer Pan-Soviet tanks—and he rocked back on his heels, pressed the button, and heaved, closing his eyes. As the thing left his fingers, he knew that he had thrown too hard. His muscles, accustomed to the heavier cast-iron grenades of his experience, had betrayed him. For a moment, he was closer to despair than at any other time in the whole phantasmagoric adventure. Then he was hit, with physical violence, by a wave of almost solid heat. It didn't smell like the heat of the tank's engines; it smelled like molten metal, with undertones of burned flesh. Immediately, there was a multiple explosion that threw him flat, as the tank's ammunition went up. There were no screams. It was too fast for that. He opened his eyes.

The turret and top armor of the tank had vanished. The two massive treads had been toppled over, one to either side. The body had collapsed between them, and it was running sticky trickles of molten metal. He blinked, rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, and looked again. Of all the many blasted and burned-out tanks, Soviet and UN, that he had seen, this was the most completely wrecked thing in his experience. And he'd done that with one grenade....

At that moment, there was a sudden rushing overhead, and an instant later the barrage began falling beyond the crest of the ridge. He looked at his watch, blinked, and looked again. That barrage was due at 0550; according to the watch, it was 0726. He was sure that, ten minutes ago, when he had looked at it, up there at the head of the ravine, it had been twenty minutes to six. He puzzled about that for a moment, and decided that he must have caught the stem on something and pulled it out, and then twisted it a little, setting the watch ahead. Then, somehow, the stem had gotten pushed back in, starting it at the new setting. That was a pretty far-fetched explanation, but it was the only one he could think of.

But about this tank, now. He was positive that he could remember throwing a grenade.... Yet he'd used his last grenade back there at the supply dump. He saw his carbine, and picked it up. That silly blackout he'd had, for a second, there; he must have dropped it. Action was open, empty magazine on the ground where

he'd dropped it. He wondered, stupidly, if one of his bullets couldn't have gone down the muzzle of the tank's gun and exploded the shell in the chamber.... Oh, the hell with it! The tank might have been hit by a premature shot from the barrage which was raging against the far slope of the ridge. He reset his watch by guess and looked down the valley. The big attack would be starting any minute, now, and there would be fleeing Commies coming up the valley ahead of the UN advance. He'd better get himself placed before they started coming in on him.

He stopped thinking about the mystery of the blown-up tank, a solution to which seemed to dance maddeningly just out of his mental reach, and found himself a place among the rocks to wait. Down the valley he could hear everything from pistols to mortars going off, and shouting in three or four racial intonations. After a while, fugitive Communists began coming, many of them without their equipment, stumbling in their haste and looking back over their shoulders. Most of them avoided the mouth of the ravine and hurried by to the left or right, but one little clump, eight or ten, came up the dry stream-bed, and stopped a hundred and fifty yards from his hiding-place to make a stand. They were Hindus, with outsize helmets over their turbans. Two of them came ahead, carrying a machine gun, followed by a third with a flame-thrower; the others retreated more slowly, firing their rifles to delay pursuit.

Cuddling the stock of his carbine to his cheek, he divided a ten-shot burst between the two machine-gunners, then, as a matter of principle, he shot the man with the flame-thrower. He had a dislike for flame-throwers; he killed every enemy he found with one. The others dropped their rifles and raised their hands, screaming: "Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe! You no shoot, me no shoot!"

A dozen men in UN battledress came up and took them prisoner. Benson shouted to them, and then rose and came down to join them. They were British—Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, advertising the fact by inconspicuous bits of tartan on their uniforms. The subaltern in command looked at him and nodded.

"Captain Benson? We were warned to be on watch for your patrol," he said. "Any of the rest of you lads get out?"

Benson shrugged. "We split up after the attack. You may run into a couple of them. Some are locals and don't speak very good English. I've got to get back to Division, myself; what's the best way?"

"Down that way. You'll overtake a couple of our walking wounded. If you don't mind going slowly, they'll show you the way to advance dressing station, and you can hitch a ride on an ambulance from there."

Benson nodded. Off on the left, there was a flurry of small-arms fire, ending in yells of "Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!"—the World War IV version of "Kamarad"!

His company was a non-T/O outfit; he came directly under Division command and didn't have to bother reporting to any regimental or brigade command-

ers. He walked for an hour with half a dozen lightly wounded Scots, rode for another hour on a big cat-truck loaded with casualties of six regiments and four races, and finally reached Division Rear, where both the Division and Corps commanders took time to compliment him on the part his last hunter patrol had played in the now complete breakthrough. His replacement, an equine-faced Spaniard with an imposing display of fruit-salad, was there, too; he solemnly took off the bracelet a refugee Caucasian goldsmith had made for his predecessor's predecessor and gave it to the new commander of what had formerly been Benson's Butchers. As he had expected, there was also another medal waiting for him.

A medical check at Task Force Center got him a warning; his last patrol had brought him dangerously close to the edge of combat fatigue. Remembering the incidents of the tank and the unaccountably fast watch, and the mysterious box and envelope which he had found in his coat pocket, he agreed, saying nothing about the questions that were puzzling him. The Psychological Department was never too busy to refuse another case; they hunted patients gleefully, each psych-shark seeking in every one proof of his own particular theories. It was with relief that he watched them fill out the red tag which gave him a priority on jet transports for home.

Ankara to Alexandria, Alexandria to Dakar, Dakar to Belém, Belém to the shattered skyline of New York, the "hurry-and-wait" procedures at Fort Carlisle, and, after the usual separation promotion, Major Fred Benson, late of Benson's Butchers, was back at teaching high school juniors the difference between H^2O and H^2SO^4.

There were two high schools in the city: McKinley High, on the east side, and Dwight Eisenhower High, on the west. A few blocks from McKinley was the Tulip Tavern, where the Eisenhower teachers came in the late afternoons; the McKinley faculty crossed town to do their after-school drinking on the west side. When Benson entered the Tulip Tavern, on a warm September afternoon, he found Bill Myers, the school psychologist, at one of the tables, smoking his pipe, checking over a stack of aptitude test forms, and drinking beer. He got a highball at the bar and carried it over to Bill's table.

"Oh, hi, Fred." The psychologist separated the finished from the unfinished work with a sheet of yellow paper and crammed the whole business into his brief case. "I was hoping somebody'd show up...."

Benson lit a cigarette, sipped his highball. They talked at random—school-talk; the progress of the war, now in its twelfth year; personal reminiscences, of the Turkish Theater where Benson had served, and the Madras Beachhead, where Myers had been.

"Bring home any souvenirs?" Myers asked.

"Not much. Couple of pistols, couple of knives, some pictures. I don't re-

member what all; haven't gotten around to unpacking them, yet.... I have a sixth of rye and some beer, at my rooms. Let's go around and see what I did bring home."

They finished their drinks and went out.

"What the devil's that?" Myers said, pointing to the cardboard box with the envelope taped to it, when Benson lifted it out of the gray-green locker.

"Bill, I don't know," Benson said. "I found it in the pocket of my coat, on my way back from my last hunter patrol.... I've never told anybody about this, before."

"That's the damnedest story I've ever heard, and in my racket you hear some honeys," Myers said, when he had finished. "You couldn't have picked that thing up in some other way, deliberately forgotten the circumstances, and fabricated this story about the tank and the grenade and the discrepancy in your watch subconsciously as an explanation?"

"My subconscious is a better liar than that," Benson replied. "It would have cobbled up some kind of a story that would stand up. This business...."

"Top Secret! For the Guide Only!" Myers frowned. "That isn't one of our marks, and if it were Soviet, it'd be tri-lingual, Russian, Hindi and Chinese."

"Well, let's see what's in it. I want this thing cleared up. I've been having some of the nastiest dreams, lately...."

"Well, be careful; it may be booby-trapped," Myers said urgently.

"Don't worry; I will."

He used a knife to slice the envelope open without untaping it from the box, and exposed five sheets of typewritten onion-skin paper. There was no letterhead, no salutation or address-line. Just a mass of chemical formulae, and a concise report on tests. It seemed to be a report on an improved syrup for a carbonated soft-drink. There were a few cryptic cautionary references to heightened physico-psychological effects.

The box was opened with the same caution, but it proved as innocent of dangers as the envelope. It contained only a half-liter bottle, wax-sealed, containing a dark reddish-brown syrup.

"There's a lot of this stuff I don't dig," Benson said, tapping the sheets of onion-skin. "I don't even scratch the surface of this rigamarole about The Guide. I'm going to get to work on this sample in the lab, at school, though. Maybe we have something, here."

At eight-thirty the next evening, after four and a half hours work, he stopped to check what he had found out.

The school's X-ray, an excellent one, had given him a complete picture of the molecular structure of the syrup. There were a couple of long-chain molecules that he could only believe after two re-examinations and a careful check of the

machine, but with the help of the notes he could deduce how they had been put together. They would be the Ingredient Alpha and Ingredient Beta referred to in the notes.

The components of the syrup were all simple and easily procurable with these two exceptions, as were the basic components from which these were made.

The mechanical guinea-pig demonstrated that the syrup contained nothing harmful to human tissue.

Of course, there were the warnings about heightened psycho-physiological effects....

He stuck a poison-label on the bottle, locked it up, and went home. The next day, he and Bill Myers got a bottle of carbonated water and mixed themselves a couple of drinks of it. It was delicious—sweet, dry, tart, sour, all of these in alternating waves of pleasure.

"We do have something, Bill," he said. "We have something that's going to give our income-tax experts headaches."

"You have," Myers corrected. "Where do you start fitting me into it?"

"We're a good team, Bill. I'm a chemist, but I don't know a thing about people. You're a psychologist. A real one; not one of these night-school boys. A juvenile psychologist, too. And what age-group spends the most money in this country for soft-drinks?"

Knowing the names of the syrup's ingredients, and what their molecular structure was like, was only the beginning. Gallon after gallon of the School Board's chemicals went down the laboratory sink; Fred Benson and Bill Myers almost lived in the fourth floor lab. Once or twice there were head-shaking warnings from the principal about the dangers of over-work. The watchmen, at all hours, would hear the occasional twanging of Benson's guitar in the laboratory, and know that he had come to a dead end on something and was trying to think. Football season came and went; basketball season; the inevitable riot between McKinley and Eisenhower rooters; the Spring concerts. The term-end exams were only a month away when Benson and Myers finally did it, and stood solemnly, each with a beaker in either hand and took alternate sips of the original and the drink mixed from the syrup they had made.

"Not a bit of difference, Fred," Myers said. "We have it!"

Benson picked up the guitar and began plunking on it.

"Hey!" Myers exclaimed. "Have you been finding time to take lessons on that thing? I never heard you play as well as that!"

They decided to go into business in St. Louis. It was centrally located, and, being behind more concentric circles of radar and counter-rocket defenses, it was in better shape than any other city in the country and most likely to stay that

way. Getting started wasn't hard; the first banker who tasted the new drink-named Evri-Flave, at Myers' suggestion—couldn't dig up the necessary money fast enough. Evri-Flave hit the market with a bang and became an instant success; soon the rainbow-tinted vending machines were everywhere, dispensing the slender, slightly flattened bottles and devouring quarters voraciously. In spite of high taxes and the difficulties of doing business in a consumers' economy upon which a war-time economy had been superimposed, both Myers and Benson were rapidly becoming wealthy. The gregarious Myers installed himself in a luxurious apartment in the city; Benson bought a large tract of land down the river toward Carondelet and started building a home and landscaping the grounds.

The dreams began bothering him again, now that the urgency of getting Evri-Flave, Inc., started had eased. They were not dreams of the men he had killed in battle, or, except for one about a huge, hot-smelling tank with a red star on the turret, about the war. Generally, they were about a strange, beautiful, office-room, in which a young man in uniform killed an older man in a plum-brown coat and a vivid blue neck-scarf. Sometimes Benson identified himself with the killer; sometimes with the old man who was killed.

He talked to Myers about these dreams, but beyond generalities about delayed effects of combat fatigue and vague advice to relax, the psychologist, now head of Sales & Promotion of Evri-Flave, Inc., could give him no help.

The war ended three years after the new company was launched. There was a momentary faltering of the economy, and then the work of reconstruction was crying hungrily for all the labor and capital that had been idled by the end of destruction, and more. There was a new flood-tide of prosperity, and Evri-Flave rode the crest. The estate at Carondelet was finished—a beautiful place, surrounded with gardens, fragrant with flowers, full of the songs of birds and soft music from concealed record-players. It made him forget the ugliness of the war, and kept the dreams from returning so frequently. All the world ought to be like that, he thought; beautiful and quiet and peaceful. People surrounded with such beauty couldn't think about war.

All the world could be like that, if only....

The UN chose St. Louis for its new headquarters—many of its offices had been moved there after the second and most destructive bombing of New York—and when the city by the Mississippi began growing into a real World Capital, the flow of money into it almost squared overnight. Benson began to take an active part in politics in the new World Sovereignty party. He did not, however, allow his political activities to distract him from the work of expanding the company to which he owed his wealth and position. There were always things to worry about.

"I don't know," Myers said to him, one evening, as they sat over a bottle of rye in the psychologist's apartment. "I could make almost as much money prac-

ticing as a psychiatrist, these days. The whole world seems to be going pure, unadulterated nuts! That affair in Munich, for instance."

"Yes." Benson grimaced as he thought of the affair in Munich—a Wagnerian concert which had terminated in an insane orgy of mass suicide. "Just a week after we started our free-sample campaign in South Germany, too...."

He stopped short, downing his drink and coughing over it.

"Bill! You remember those sheets of onion-skin in that envelope?"

"The foundation of our fortunes; I wonder where you really did get that.... Fred!" His eyes widened in horror. "That caution about 'heightened psycho-physiological effects,' that we were never able to understand!"

Benson nodded grimly. "And think of all the crazy cases of mass-hysteria—that baseball-game riot in Baltimore; the time everybody started tearing off each others' clothes in Milwaukee; the sex-orgy in New Orleans. And the sharp uptrend in individual psycho-neurotic and psychotic behavior. All in connection with music, too, and all after Evri-Flave got on the market."

"We'll have to stop it; pull Evri-Flave off the market," Myers said. "We can't be responsible for letting this go on."

"We can't stop, either. There's at least a two months' supply out in the hands of jobbers and distributors over whom we have no control. And we have all these contractual obligations, to buy the entire output of the companies that make the syrup for us; if we stop buying, they can sell it in competition with us, as long as they don't infringe our trade-name. And we can't prevent pirating. You know how easily we were able to duplicate that sample I brought back from Turkey. Why, our legal department's kept busy all the time prosecuting unlicensed manufacturers as it is."

"We've got to do something, Fred!" There was almost a whiff of hysteria in Myers' voice.

"We will. We'll start, first thing tomorrow, on a series of tests—just you and I, like the old times at Eisenhower High. First, we want to be sure that Evri-Flave really is responsible. It'd be a hell of a thing if we started a public panic against our own product for nothing. And then...."

It took just two weeks, in a soundproofed and guarded laboratory on Benson's Carondelet estate, to convict their delicious drink of responsibility for that Munich State Opera House Horror and everything else. Reports from confidential investigators in Munich confirmed this. It had, of course, been impossible to interview the two thousand men and women who had turned the Opera House into a pyre for their own immolation, but none of the tiny minority who had kept their sanity and saved their lives had tasted Evri-Flave.

It took another month to find out exactly how the stuff affected the human nervous system, and they almost wrecked their own nervous systems in the pro-

cess. The real villain, they discovered, was the incredible-looking long-chain compound alluded to in the original notes as Ingredient Beta; its principal physiological effect was to greatly increase the sensitivity of the aural nerves. Not only was the hearing range widened—after consuming thirty CC of Beta, they could hear the sound of an ultrasonic dog-whistle quite plainly—but the very quality of all audible sounds was curiously enhanced and altered. Myers, the psychologist, who was also well grounded in neurology, explained how the chemical produced this effect; it meant about as much to Benson as some of his chemistry did to Bill Myers. There was also a secondary, purely psychological, effect. Certain musical chords had definite effects on the emotions of the hearer, and the subject, beside being directly influenced by the music, was rendered extremely open to verbal suggestions accompanied by a suitable musical background.

Benson transferred the final results of this stage of the research to the black notebook and burned the scratch-sheets.

"That's how it happened, then," he said. "The Munich thing was the result of all that Gøtterdåmmerung music. There was a band at the baseball park in Baltimore. The New Orleans Orgy started while a local radio station was broadcasting some of this new dance-music. Look, these tone-clusters, here, have a definite sex-excitation effect. This series of six chords, which occur in some of the Wagnerian stuff; effect, a combined feeling of godlike isolation and despair. And these consecutive fifths—a sense of danger, anger, combativeness. You know, we could work out a whole range of emotional stimuli to fit the effects of Ingredient Beta...."

"We don't want to," Myers said. "We want to work out a substitute for Beta that will keep the flavor of the drink without the psycho-physiological effects."

"Yes, sure. I have some of the boys at the plant lab working on that. Gave them a lot of syrup without Beta, and told them to work out cheap additives to restore the regular Evri-Flave taste; told them it was an effort to find a cheap substitute for an expensive ingredient. But look, Bill. You and I both see, for instance, that a powerful world-wide supra-national sovereignty is the only guarantee of world peace. If we could use something like this to help overcome antiquated verbal prejudices and nationalistic emotional attachments...."

"No!" Myers said. "I won't ever consent to anything like that, Fred! Not even in a cause like world peace; use a thing like this for a good, almost holy, cause now, and tomorrow we, or those who would come after us, would be using it to create a tyranny. You know what year this is, Bill?"

"Why, 1984," Benson said.

"Yes. You remember that old political novel of Orwell's, written about forty years ago? Well, that's a picture of the kind of world you'd have, eventually, no matter what kind of a world you started out to make. Fred, don't ever think of using this stuff for a purpose like that. If you try it, I'll fight you with every resource

I have."

There was a fanatical, almost murderous, look in Bill Myers' eyes. Benson put the notebook in his pocket, then laughed and threw up his hands.

"Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!" he cried. "You're right, of course, Bill. We can't even trust the UN with a thing like this. It makes the H-bomb look like a stone hatchet.... Well, I'll call Grant, at the plant lab, and see how his boys are coming along with the substitute; as soon as we get it, we can put out a confidential letter to all our distributors and syrup-manufacturers...."

He walked alone in the garden at Carondelet, watching the color fade out of the sky and the twilight seep in among the clipped yews. All the world could be like this garden, a place of peace and beauty and quiet, if only.... All the world would be a beautiful and peaceful garden, in his own lifetime! He had the means of making it so!

Three weeks later, he murdered his friend and partner, Bill Myers. It was a suicide; nobody but Fred Benson knew that he had taken fifty CC of pure Ingredient Beta in a couple of cocktails while listening to the queer phonograph record that he had played half an hour before blowing his brains out.

The decision had cost Benson a battle with his conscience from which he had emerged the sole survivor. The conscience was buried along with Bill Myers, and all that remained was a purpose.

Evri-Flave stayed on the market unaltered. The night before the national election, the World Sovereignty party distributed thousands of gallons of Evri-Flave; their speakers, on every radio and television network, were backgrounded by soft music. The next day, when the vote was counted, it was found that the American Nationalists had carried a few backwoods precincts in the Rockies and the Southern Appalachians and one county in Alaska, where there had been no distribution of Evri-Flave.

The dreams came back more often, now that Bill Myers was gone. Benson was only beginning to realize what a large fact in his life the companionship of the young psychologist had been. Well, a world of peace and beauty was an omelet worth the breaking of many eggs....

He purchased another great tract of land near the city, and donated it to the UN for their new headquarters buildings; the same architects and landscapists who had created the estate at Carondelet were put to work on it. In the middle of what was to become World City, they erected a small home for Fred Benson. Benson was often invited to address the delegates to the UN; always, there was soft piped-in music behind his words. He saw to it that Evri-Flave was available free to all UN personnel. The Senate of the United States elected him as perpetual U. S. delegate-in-chief to the UN; not long after, the Security Council elected him their perpetual chairman.

In keeping with his new dignities, and to ameliorate his youthful appearance, he grew a mustache and, eventually, a small beard. The black notebook in which he kept the records of his experiments was always with him; page after page was filled with notes. Experiments in sonics, like the one which had produced the ultrasonic stun-gun which rendered lethal weapons unnecessary for police and defense purposes, or the new musical combinations with which he was able to play upon every emotion and instinct.

But he still dreamed, the same recurring dream of the young soldier and the old man in the office. By now, he was consistently identifying himself with the latter. He took to carrying one of the thick-barrelled stun-pistols always, now. Alone, he practiced constantly with it, drawing, breaking soap-bubbles with the concentrated sound-waves it projected. It was silly, perhaps, but it helped him in his dreams. Now, the old man with whom he identified himself would draw a stun-pistol, occasionally, to defend himself.

The years drained one by one through the hour-glass of Time. Year after year, the world grew more peaceful, more beautiful. There were no more incidents like the mass-suicide of Munich or the mass-perversions of New Orleans; the playing and even the composing of music was strictly controlled—no dangerous notes or chords could be played in a world drenched with Ingredient Beta. Steadily the idea grew that peace and beauty were supremely good, that violence and ugliness were supremely evil. Even competitive sports which simulated violence; even children born ugly and misshapen....

He finished the breakfast which he had prepared for himself—he trusted no food that another had touched—and knotted the vivid blue scarf about his neck before slipping into the loose coat of glossy plum-brown, then checked the stun-pistol and pocketed the black notebook, its plastileather cover glossy from long use. He stood in front of the mirror, brushing his beard, now snow-white. Two years, now, and he would be eighty—had he been anyone but The Guide, he would have long ago retired to the absolute peace and repose of one of the Elders' Havens. Peace and repose, however, were not for The Guide; it would take another twenty years to finish his task of remaking the world, and he would need every day of it that his medical staff could borrow or steal for him. He made an eye-baffling practice draw with the stun-pistol, then holstered it and started down the spiral stairway to the office below.

There was the usual mass of papers on his desk. A corps of secretaries had screened out everything but what required his own personal and immediate attention, but the business of guiding a world could only be reduced to a certain point. On top was the digest of the world's news for the past twenty-four hours, and below that was the agenda for the afternoon's meeting of the Council. He laid both in front of him, reading over the former and occasionally making a note on

the latter. Once his glance strayed to the cardboard box in front of him, with the envelope taped to it—the latest improvement on the Evri-Flave syrup, with the report from his own chemists, all conditioned to obedience, loyalty and secrecy. If they thought he was going to try that damned stuff on himself....

There was a sudden gleam of light in the middle of the room, in front of his desk. No, a mist, through which a blue light seemed to shine. The stun-pistol was in his hand—his instinctive reaction to anything unusual—and pointed into the shining mist when it vanished and a man appeared in front of him; a man in the baggy green combat-uniform that he himself had worn fifty years before; a man with a heavy automatic pistol in his hand. The gun was pointed directly at him.

The Guide aimed quickly and pressed the trigger of the ultrasonic stunner. The pistol dropped soundlessly on the thick-piled rug; the man in uniform slumped in an inert heap. The Guide sprang to his feet and rounded the desk, crossing to and bending over the intruder. Why, this was the dream that had plagued him through the years. But it was ending differently. The young man—his face was startlingly familiar, somehow—was not killing the old man. Those years of practice with the stun-pistol....

He stooped and picked the automatic up. The young man was unconscious, and The Guide had his pistol, now. He slipped the automatic into his pocket and straightened beside his inert would-be slayer.

A shimmering globe of blue mist appeared around them, brightened to a dazzle, and dimmed again to a colored mist before it vanished, and when it cleared away, he was standing beside the man in uniform, in the sandy bed of a dry stream at the mouth of a little ravine, and directly in front of him, looming above him, was a thing that had not been seen in the world for close to half a century—a big, hot-smelling tank with a red star on its turret.

He might have screamed—the din of its treads and engines deafened him—and, in panic, he turned and ran, his old legs racing, his old heart pumping madly. The noise of the tank increased as machine guns joined the uproar. He felt the first bullet strike him, just above the hips—no pain; just a tremendous impact. He might have felt the second bullet, too, as the ground tilted and rushed up at his face. Then he was diving into a tunnel of blackness that had no end....

Captain Fred Benson, of Benson's Butchers, had been jerked back into consciousness when the field began to build around him. He was struggling to rise, fumbling the grenade out of his pocket, when it collapsed. Sure enough, right in front of him, so close that he could smell the very heat of it, was the big tank with the red star on its turret. He cursed the sextet of sanctimonious double-crossers eight thousand miles and fifty years away in space-time. The machine guns had stopped—probably because they couldn't be depressed far enough to aim at him, now; that was a notorious fault of some of the newer Pan-Soviet tanks. He had the

bomb out of his pocket, when the machine guns began firing again, this time at something on his left. Wondering what had created the diversion, he rocked back on his heels, pressed the button, and heaved, closing his eyes. As the thing left his fingers, he knew that he had thrown too hard. His muscles, accustomed to the heavier cast-iron grenades, had betrayed him. For a moment, he was closer to despair than at any other time in the whole phantasmagoric adventure. Then he was hit, with physical force, by a wave of almost solid heat. It didn't smell like the heat of the tank's engines; it smelled like molten metal, with undertones of burned flesh. Immediately, there was a multiple explosion that threw him flat, as the tank's ammunition went up. There were no screams. It was too fast for that. He opened his eyes.

The turret and top armor of the tank had vanished. The two massive treads had been toppled over, one to either side. The body had collapsed between them, and it was running sticky trickles of molten metal. He blinked, rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, and looked again. Of all the many blasted and burned-out tanks, Soviet and UN, that he had seen, this was the most completely wrecked thing in his experience. And he'd done that with one grenade....

Remembering the curious manner in which, at the last, the tank had begun firing at something to the side, he looked around, to see the crumpled body in the pale violet-gray trousers and the plum-brown coat. Finding his carbine and reloading it, he went over to the dead man, turning the body over. He was an old man, with a white mustache and a small white beard—why, if the mustache were smaller and there were no beard, he would pass for Benson's own father, who had died in 1962. The clothes weren't Turkish or Armenian or Persian, or anything one would expect in this country.

The old man had a pistol in his coat pocket, and Benson pulled it out and looked at it, then did a double-take and grabbed for his own holster, to find it empty. The pistol was his own 9.5 Colt automatic. He looked at the dead man, with the white beard and the vivid blue neck-scarf, and he was sure that he had never seen him before. He'd had that pistol when he'd come down the ravine....

There was another pistol under the dead man's coat, in a shoulder-holster; a queer thing with a thick round barrel, like an old percussion pepper-box, and a diaphragm instead of a muzzle. Probably projected ultrasonic waves. He holstered his own Colt and pocketed the unknown weapon. There was a black plastileather-bound notebook. It was full of notes. Chemical formulae, yes, and some stuff on sonics; that tied in with the queer pistol. He pocketed that. He'd look both over, when he had time and privacy, two scarce commodities in the Army....

At that moment, there was a sudden rushing overhead, and an instant later, the barrage began falling beyond the crest of the ridge. He looked at his watch, blinked, and looked again. That barrage was due at 0550; according to his watch,

it was 0726. That was another mystery, to go with the question of who the dead man was, where he had come from, and how he'd gotten hold of Benson's pistol. Yes, and how that tank had gotten blown up. Benson was sure he had used his last grenade back at the supply-dump.

The hell with it; he'd worry about all that later. The attack was due any minute, now, and there would be fleeing Commies coming up the valley ahead, of the UN advance. He'd better get himself placed before they started coming in on him.

He stopped thinking about the multiple mystery, a solution to which seemed to dance maddeningly just out of his mental reach, and found himself a place among the rocks to wait, and while he waited, he looked over the plastileather-bound notebook. In civil life, he had been a high school chemistry teacher, but the stuff in this book was utterly new to him. Some of it he could understand readily enough; the rest of it he could dig out for himself. Stuff about some kind of a carbonated soft-drink, and about a couple of unbelievable-looking long-chain molecules....

After a while, fugitive Communists began coming up the valley to make their stand.

Benson put away the notebook, picked up his carbine, and cuddled the stock to his cheek....

JOHN JONES'S DOLLAR

Take a board with 64 squares on it. Put a grain of wheat on the first square—two on the second—four on the third. Keep doubling in this manner and you will find there isn't enough wheat in the world to fill the sixty-fourth square. It can be the same with compound interest.

On the 201st day of the year 3221 A.D., the professor of history at the University of Terra seated himself in front of the Visaphone and prepared to deliver the daily lecture to his class, the members of which resided in different portions of the earth.

The instrument before which he seated himself was very like a great window sash, on account of the fact that there were three or four hundred frosted glass squares visible. In a space at the center, not occupied by any of these glass squares, was a dark oblong area and a ledge holding a piece of chalk. And above the area was a huge brass cylinder; toward this brass cylinder the professor would soon direct his subsequent remarks.

In order to assure himself that it was time to press the button which would notify the members of the class in history to approach their local Visaphones, the professor withdrew from his vest pocket a small contrivance which he held to his ear. Upon moving a tiny switch attached to the instrument, a metallic voice, seeming to come from somewhere in space, repeated mechanically: "Fifteen o'clock and one minute—fifteen o'clock and one minute—fifteen o'clock and one min—" Quickly, the professor replaced the instrument in his vest pocket and pressed a button at the side of the Visaphone.

As though in answer to the summons, the frosted squares began, one by one, to show the faces and shoulders of a peculiar type of young men; young men with great bulging foreheads, bald, toothless, and wearing immense horn spectacles. One square, however, still remained empty. On noticing this, a look of irritation passed over the professor's countenance.

But, seeing that every other glass square but this one was filled up, he commenced to talk.

"I am pleased, gentlemen, to see you all posted at your local Visaphones this afternoon. I have prepared my lecture today upon a subject which is, perhaps, of more economic interest than historical. Unlike the previous lectures, my talk will not confine itself to the happenings of a few years, but will gradually embrace the course of ten centuries, the ten centuries, in fact, which terminated three hundred years before the present date. My lecture will be an exposition of the effects of the John Jones Dollar, originally deposited in the dawn of civilization, or to be more precise, in the year of 1921—just thirteen hundred years ago. This John Jon—"

At this point in the professor's lecture, the frosted glass square which hitherto had shown no image, now filled up. Sternly he gazed at the head and shoulders that had just appeared.

"B262H72476Male, you are late to class again. What excuse have you to offer today?"

From the hollow cylinder emanated a shrill voice, while the lips of the picture on the glass square moved in unison with the words:

"Professor, you will perceive by consulting your class book, that I have recently taken up my residence near the North Pole. For some reason, wireless communication between the Central Energy Station and all points north of 89 degrees was cut off a while ago, on account of which fact I could not appear in the Visaphone. Hence—"

"Enough, sir," roared the professor. "Always ready with an excuse, B262H72476Male. I shall immediately investigate your tale."

From his coat pocket, the professor withdrew an instrument which, although supplied with an earpiece and a mouthpiece, had no wires whatever attached. Raising it to his lips, he spoke:

"Hello. Central Energy Station, please." A pause ensued. "Central Energy Station? This is the professor of history at the University of Terra, speaking. One of my students informs me that the North Pole region was out of communication with the Visaphone System this morning. Is that statement true? I would—"

A voice, apparently from nowhere, spoke into the professor's ear. "Quite true, Professor. A train of our ether waves accidently fell into parallelism with a train of waves from the Venus Substation. By the most peculiar mischance, the two trains happened to be displaced, with reference to each other, one half of a wave length, with the unfortunate result that the negative points of one coincided with the positive points of maximum amplitude of the other. Hence the two wave trains nullified each other and communication ceased for one hundred and eighty-five seconds—until the earth had revolved far enough to throw them out of parallelism."

"Ah! Thank you," replied the professor. He dropped his instrument into his

coat pocket and gazed in the direction of the glass square whose image had so aroused his ire. "I apologize, B262H72476Male, for my suspicions as to your veracity—but I had in mind several former experiences." He shook a warning forefinger. "I will now resume my talk."

"A moment ago, gentlemen, I mentioned the John Jones Dollar. Some of you who have just enrolled with the class will undoubtedly say to yourselves: 'What is a John Jones? What is a Dollar?'

"In the early days, before the present scientific registration of human beings was instituted by the National Eugenics Society, man went around under a crude multi-reduplicative system of nomenclature. Under this system there were actually more John Joneses than there are calories in a British Thermal Unit. But there was one John Jones, in particular, living in the twentieth century, to whom I shall refer in my lecture. Not much is known of his personal life except that he was an ardent socialist—a bitter enemy, in fact, of the private ownership of wealth.

"Now as to the Dollar. At this day, when the Psycho-Erg, a combination of the Psych, the unit of esthetic satisfaction, and the Erg, the unit of mechanical energy, is recognized as the true unit of value, it seems difficult to believe that in the twentieth century and for more than ten centuries thereafter, the Dollar, a metallic circular disk, was being passed from hand to hand in exchange for the essentials of life.

"But nevertheless, such was the case. Man exchanged his mental or physical energy for these Dollars. He then re-exchanged the Dollars for sustenance, raiment, pleasure, and operations for the removal of the vermiform appendix.

"A great many individuals, however, deposited their Dollars in a stronghold called a bank. These banks invested the Dollars in loans and commercial enterprises, with the result that, every time the earth traversed the solar ecliptic, the banks compelled each borrower to repay, or to acknowledge as due, the original loan, plus six one-hundredths of that loan. And to the depositor, the banks paid three one-hundredths of the deposited Dollars for the use of the disks. This was known as three percent, or bank interest.

"Now, the safety of Dollars, when deposited in banks, was not absolutely assured to the depositor. At times, the custodians of these Dollars were wont to appropriate them and proceed to portions of the earth, sparsely inhabited and accessible with difficulty. And at other times, nomadic groups known as 'yeggmen' visited the banks, opened the vaults by force, and departed, carrying with them the contents.

"But to return to our subject. In the year 1921, one of these numerous John Joneses performed an apparently inconsequential action which caused the name of John Jones to go down in history. What did he do?

"He proceeded to one of these banks, known at that time as 'The First Na-

tional Bank of Chicago,' and deposited there, one of these disks—a silver Dollar—to the credit of a certain individual. And this individual to whose credit the Dollar was deposited was no other person than the fortieth descendant of John Jones who stipulated in paper which was placed in the files of the bank, that the descendancy was to take place along the oldest child of each of the generations which would constitute his posterity.

"The bank accepted the Dollar under that understanding, together with another condition imposed by this John Jones, namely, that the interest was to be compounded annually. That meant that at the close of each year, the bank was to credit the account of John Jones's fortieth descendant with three one-hundredths of the account as it stood at the beginning of the year.

"History tells us little more concerning this John Jones—only that he died in the year 1931, or ten years afterward, leaving several children.

"Now you gentlemen who are taking mathematics under Professor L127M72421Male, of the University of Mars, will remember that where any number such as X, in passing through a progressive cycle of change, grows at the end of that cycle by a proportion p, then the value of the original X, after n cycles, becomes X(1 + p)^n.

"Obviously, in this case, X equalled one Dollar; p equalled three one-hundredths; and n will depend upon any number of years which we care to consider, following the date of deposit. By a simple calculation, those of you who are today mentally alert can check up the results that I shall set forth in my lecture.

"At the time that John Jones died, the amount in the First National Bank of Chicago to the credit of John Jones the fortieth, was as follows."

The professor seized the chalk and wrote rapidly upon the oblong space:

1931 10 years elapsed $1.34

"The peculiar sinuous hieroglyphic," he explained, "is an ideograph representing the Dollar.

"Well, gentlemen, time went on as time will, until a hundred years had passed by. The First National Bank still existed, and the locality, Chicago, had become the largest center of population upon the earth. Through the investments which had taken place, and the yearly compounding of interest, the status of John Jones's deposit was now as follows." He wrote:

2021 100 years elapsed $19.10

"In the following century, many minor changes, of course, took place in man's mode of living; but the so-called socialists still agitated widely for the cessation of private ownership of wealth; the First National Bank still accepted Dollars for safe keeping, and the John Jones Dollar still continued to grow. With about thirty-four generations yet to come, the account now stood:

2121 200 years elapsed $364

"And by the end of the succeeding hundred years, it had grown to what constituted an appreciable bit of exchange value in those days—thus:

2221 300 years $6,920

"Now the century which followed contains an important date. The date I am referring to is the year 2299 A.D., or the year in which every human being born upon the globe was registered under a numerical name at the central bureau of the National Eugenics Society. In our future lessons which will treat with that period of detail, I shall ask you to memorize that date.

"The socialists still agitated, fruitlessly, but the First National Bank of Chicago was now the first International Bank of the Earth. And how great had John Jones's Dollar grown? Let us examine the account, both on that important historical date, and also at the close of the 400th year since it was deposited. Look:

2299 378 years $68,900 2321 400 years $132,000

"But gentlemen, it had not reached the point where it could be termed an unusually large accumulation of wealth. For larger accumulations existed upon the earth. A descendant of a man once known as John D. Rockefeller possessed an accumulation of great size, but which, as a matter of fact, was rapidly dwindling as it passed from generation to generation. So, let us travel ahead another one hundred years. During this time, as we learn from our historical and political archives, the socialists began to die out, since they at last realized the utter futility of combating the balance of power. The account, though, now stood:

2421 500 years $2,520,000

"It is hardly necessary for me to make any comment. Those of you who are most astute, and others of you who flunked my course before and are now taking it the second time, of course know what is coming.

"During the age in which this John Jones lived, there lived also a man, a so-called scientist called Metchnikoff. We know, from a study of our vast collection of Egyptian Papyri and Carnegie Library books, that this Metchnikoff promulgated the theory that old age—or rather senility—was caused by colon-bacillus. This fact was later verified. But while he was correct in the etiology of senility, he was crudely primeval in the therapeutics of it.

"He proposed, gentlemen, to combat and kill this bacillus by utilizing the fermented lacteal fluid from a now extinct animal called the cow, models of which you can see at any time at the Solaris Museum."

A chorus of shrill, piping laughter emanated from the brass cylinder. The professor waited until the merriment had subsided and then continued:

"I beg of you, gentlemen, do not smile. This was merely one of the many similar quaint superstitions existing in that age.

"But a real scientist, Professor K122B62411Male, again attacked the problem in the twenty-fifth century. Since the cow was now extinct, he could not waste his valuable time experimenting with fermented cow lacteal fluid. He discovered the old v-rays of Radium—the rays which you physicists will remember are not deflected by a magnetic field—were really composed of two sets of rays, which he termed the g rays and the e rays. These last named rays—only when isolated—completely devitalized all colon-bacilli which lay in their path, without in the least affecting the integrity of any interposed organic cells. The great result, as many of you already know, was that the life of man was extended to nearly two hundred years. That, I state unequivocally, was a great century for the human race.

"But I spoke of another happening—one, perhaps, of more interest than importance. I referred to the bank account of John Jones the fortieth. It, gentlemen, had grown to such a prodigious sum that a special bank and board of directors had to be created in order to care for, and reinvest it. By scanning the following notation, you will perceive the truth of my statement:

2521 600 years $47,900,000

"By the year 2621 A.D., two events of stupendous importance took place. There is scarcely a man in this class who has not heard of how Professor P222D29333Male accidentally stumbled upon the scientific fact that the effect of gravity is reversed upon any body which vibrates perpendicularly to the plane of the ecliptic with a frequency which is an even multiple of the logarithm of 2 of the Naperian base 'e.' At once, special vibrating cars were constructed which carried mankind to all planets. That discovery of Professor P222D29333Male did nothing less than open up seven new territories to our inhabitants; namely: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. In the great land rush that ensued, thousands who were previously poor became rich.

"But, gentlemen, land which so far had been constituted one of the main sources of wealth, was shortly to become valuable for individual golf links only, as it is today, on account of another scientific discovery.

"This second discovery was in reality, not a discovery, but the perfection of a chemical process, the principles of which had been known for many centuries. I am alluding to the construction of the vast reducing factories, one upon each planet, to which the bodies of all persons who have died on their respective planets are at once shipped by Aerial Express. Since this process is used today, all of you understand the methods employed; how each body is reduced by heat to its component constituents: hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, phosphorus, and so forth; how these separated constituents are stored in special reservoirs together with the components from thousands of other corpses; how these elements are then synthetically combined into food tablets for those of us who are yet alive—thus completing an endless chain from the dead to the living. Naturally

then, agriculture and stock-raising ceased, since the food problem, with which man had coped from time immemorial, was solved. The two direct results were, first—that land lost the inflated values it had possessed when it was necessary for tillage, and second—that men were at last given enough leisure to enter the fields of science and art.

"And as to the John Jones Dollar, which now embraced countless industries and vast territory on the earth, it stood, in value:

2621 700 years $912,000,000

"In truth, gentlemen, it now constituted the largest private fortune on the terrestrial globe. And in that year, 2621 A.D., there were thirteen generations yet to come, before John Jones the fortieth would arrive.

"To continue. In the year 2721 A.D., an important political battle was concluded in the Solar System Senate and House of Representatives. I am referring to the great controversy as to whether the Earth's moon was a sufficient menace to interplanetary navigation to warrant its removal. The outcome of the wrangle was that the question was decided in the affirmative. Consequently—

"But I beg your pardon, young men. I occasionally lose sight of the fact that you are not so well informed upon historical matters as myself. Here I am, talking to you about the moon, totally forgetful that many of you are puzzled as to my meaning. I advise all of you who have not yet attended the Solaris Museum on Jupiter, to take a trip there some Sunday afternoon. The Interplanetary Suburban Line runs trains every half hour on that day. You will find there a complete working model of the old satellite of the Earth, which, before it was destroyed, furnished this planet light at night through the crude medium of reflection.

"On account of this decision as to the inadvisability of allowing the moon to remain where it was, engineers commenced its removal in the year 2721. Piece by piece, it was chipped away and brought to the Earth in Interplanetary freight cars. These pieces were then propelled by Zoodolite explosive, in the direction of the Milky Way, with a velocity of 11,217 meters per second. This velocity, of course, gave each departing fragment exactly the amount of kinetic energy it required to enable it to overcome the backward pull of the Earth from here to infinity. I dare say those moon-hunks are going yet.

"At the start of the removal of the moon in 2721 A.D., the accumulated wealth of John Jones the fortieth, stood:

2721 800 years $17,400,000,000

"Of course, with such a colossal sum at their command, the directors of the fund had made extensive investments on Mars and Venus.

"By the end of the twenty-eighth century, or the year 2807 A.D., the moon had been completely hacked away and sent piecemeal into space, the job having required 86 years. I give, herewith, the result of John Jones's Dollar, both at the

date when the moon was completely removed and also at the close of the 900th year after its deposit:

2807 886 years $219,000,000,000 2821 900 years $332,000,000,000

"The meaning of those figures, gentlemen, as stated in simple language, was that the John Jones Dollar now comprised practically all the wealth on Earth, Mars, and Venus—with the exception of one university site on each planet, which was, of course, school property.

"And now I will ask you to advance with me to the year 2906 A.D. In this year the directors of the John Jones fund awoke to the fact that they were in a dreadful predicament. According to the agreement under which John Jones deposited his Dollar away back in the year 1921, interest was to be compounded annually at three percent. In the year 2900 A.D., the thirty-ninth generation of John Jones was alive, being represented by a gentleman named J664M42721Male, who was thirty years of age and engaged to be married to a young lady named T246M42652Female.

"Doubtless, you will ask, what was the predicament in which the directors found themselves. Simply this:

"A careful appraisement of the wealth on Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury, and likewise Earth, together with an accurate calculation of the remaining heat in the Sun and an appraisement of that heat at a very decent valuation per calorie, demonstrated that the total wealth of the Solar System amounted to $6,309,525,241,362.15.

"But unfortunately, a simple computation showed that if Mr. J664M42721Male married Miss T246M42652Female, and was blessed by a child by the year 2921, which year marked the thousandth year since the deposit of the John Jones Dollar, then in that year there would be due the child, the following amount:

2921 1,000 years $6,310,000,000,000

"It simply showed beyond all possibility of argument, that by 2921 A.D., we would be $474,758,637.85 shy—that we would be unable to meet the debt to John Jones the fortieth.

"I tell you, gentlemen, the Board of Directors was frantic. Such wild suggestions were put forth as the sending of an expeditionary force to the nearest star in order to capture some other Solar System and thus obtain more territory to make up the deficit. But that project was impossible on account of the number of years that it would have required.

"Visions of immense law suits disturbed the slumber of those unfortunate individuals who formed the John Jones Dollar Directorship. But on the brink of one of the biggest civil actions the courts had ever known, something occurred that altered everything."

The professor again withdrew the tiny instrument from his vest pocket, held

it to his ear and adjusted the switch. A metallic voice rasped: "Fifteen o'clock and fifty-two minutes—fifteen o'clock and fifty-two minutes—fift—" He replaced the instrument and went on with his talk.

"I must hasten to the conclusion of my lecture, gentlemen, as I have an engagement with Professor C122B24999Male of the University of Saturn at sixteen o'clock. Now, let me see; I was discussing the big civil action that was hanging over the heads of the John Jones Dollar directors.

"Well, this Mr. J664M42721Male, the thirty-ninth descendant of the original John Jones, had a lover's quarrel with Miss T246M42652Female, which immediately destroyed the probability of their marriage. Neither gave in to the other. Neither ever married. And when Mr. J664M42721Male died in 2946 A.D., of a broken heart, as it was claimed, he was single and childless.

"As a result, there was no one to turn the Solar System over to. Immediately, the Interplanetary Government stepped in and took possession of it. At that instant, of course, private property ceased. In the twinkling of an eye almost, we reached the true socialistic and democratic condition for which man had futilely hoped throughout the ages.

"That is all today, gentlemen. Class is dismissed."

One by one, the faces faded from the Visaphone.

For a moment, the professor stood ruminating.

"A wonderful man, that old socialist, John Jones the first," he said softly to himself, "a farseeing man, a bright man, considering that he lived in such a dark era as the twentieth century. But how nearly his well-contrived scheme went wrong. Suppose that fortieth descendant had been born?"

JOY RIDE

Men or machines—something had to give—though not necessarily one or the other. Why not both?

(HISTORIAN'S NOTE: *The following statements are extracted from depositions taken by the Commission of Formal Inquiry appointed by the Peloric Rehabilitation Council, a body formed as a provisional government in the third month of the Calamity*.)

1

My name is Andrews, third assistant vice president in charge of maintenance for Cybernetic Publishers.

It is not generally known that all the periodical publications for the world were put out by Cybernetics. We did not conceal the monopoly deliberately, but we found that using the names of other publishing houses helped to give our magazines an impression of variety. Of course, we didn't want too much variety, either; only the tried and tested kind.

Cybernetics gained its monopoly by cutting costs of production. It had succeeded in linking electronic calculators to photo-copying machines. Through this combination, all kinds of texts and illustrations could be produced automatically.

Formula punch cards, fed to the calculators, produced articles and stories of standard styles and substance. Market analysts in the research division designed the formulas for the punch cards. An editing machine shuffled the cards before giving them to the calculating machines.

The shuffling produced enough variation in the final product to suggest novelty to the reader without actually presenting anything strange or unexpected.

Once the cards were in the machine, they set off electronic impulses which, by a scanning process, projected photographic images of type and illustrations to a ribbon of paper. This ribbon ran through a battery of xerographic machines to reproduce the exact number of copies specified by the market indicator.

Everything worked smoothly without the necessity for thought, which, as

you know, is expensive and often wasteful.

In the second week of the Calamity, one machine after another seemed to go put of order. I couldn't tell whether the trouble was in the cards, in the research office, or in the machines.

First, one produced something entitled "A Critique of the Bureaucratic Culture Pattern." Then another would give out nothing but lyric poems. A third simply printed obvious gibberish, the letters F-R-E-E-D-O-M. And one of our oldest machines ran off a series of limericks of a decidedly pungent flavor.

I did all I could to straighten them out. Even our cleaning compounds were analyzed for traces of alcohol. But we weren't able to locate the trouble. And we didn't dare shut off the power because that would have backed up our continuous stream of pulp and paper all the way to Canada, Alaska and Scandinavia. There didn't seem to be anything to do but let the publications go on through to the distribution center.

Before they were returned to the pulp mills, some of the publications reached private hands and created something of a stir, especially the limericks. One of them went something like this: "There was a young...." (Passage defaced.)

2

My name is Minton, traffic officer emeritus on the Extrapolated Parkway.

The Parkway was equipped with the usual electronic controls to propel cars magnetically, to maintain a safe distance between all cars, and to hold them automatically in their proper lanes. The controls also turned cars off the Parkways at the proper exit, according to the settings on the individual automobile's direction-finder.

On the ninth day of the Calamity, the controls became erratic. Cars ran off the highway at the wrong exits, even though their direction-finders seemed to be in good order. Many turned around in circles at entrances to the Parkway and failed to enter. Drivers abandoned cars in despair and actually made their way on foot. Those who remembered how to steer by hand, mainly persons with obsolete cars, were able to travel by using back country roads. It was almost like old times, when we used to have accidents.

Meanwhile, I kept getting radio calls from motorists whose cars were trapped on the highway. They were unable to turn off anywhere, even at the wrong exit. The magnetic propellers forced them to continue traveling a circular route for hours. I don't know what they expected *me* to do about it.

They tried to say I tampered with the controls, but I had no such orders. There was nothing in the Traffic Officer's Manual to cover this situation, so I naturally did nothing.

Anyway, I think that the trouble lay with the direction-finders in the cars rather than with the Highway Controls. For several days previously, a great many

cars no matter how the automatic direction-finders were set, had been known to head for water if they weren't watched. Because of the fact that so many motorists had formed a habit of snoozing, once the car was in motion, there were a number of drownings. If we could have done anything to prevent them, we probably would have, though that wasn't our job.

3

MY name is Elder, sound director for Station 40 N 180.

We had noticed nothing unusual about our broadcasts until the third day of the Calamity. That was the first time one of our ultra-sensitive microphones began to pick up and broadcast speeches from unknown sources.

Our third assistant monitor was the first to notice. He called and told me that interference was disrupting the program. A few minutes later, he said that the sponsor's message, as broadcast, did not conform to the copy which had been put on the tape. (To eliminate studio errors, all our broadcast programs were first recorded on electro-magnetic tape and edited before they were released.)

We checked and found that none of the commercial messages were going through properly. The fact is that they were broadcast very improperly.

I tested the microphone myself and was reported as saying, "What difference does it make?" I had used the conventional testing phrases, "One, two, three, four," yet all three monitors swore that the other sentence had been uttered in my voice.

We switched at once to broadcasting music exclusively as an alternative to verbal programs, but the microphones continued to pickup vocal interference. The voices were of many kinds and not always distinct. They sounded sincere and the words were plain, but I could not discern any meaning in them.

For a while, until the Calamity affected wire communications, too, we received telephone comments from our audience.

A few people complained about the confusion, but most asked us to turn off the music and let the voices come through clearly.

One of the listeners said to us, "I haven't heard men speak their minds so plainly since the morning Grandma wrecked Grandpa's new helicopter."

4

My name is Wilson. I manned the remote control panel for the Duplicator Construction Company.

As you know, we directed a battery of building machines which erected mass housing projects. I directed only the destination of our machines. Once I sent them to a site, they completed their work automatically with the materials installed at our supply depot.

A single machine could prepare a site and erect a complete house in one

day. With an army of 5,000 machines, our firm had succeeded in building as many houses as there was room for, and we had started on the demolition of our original buildings for replacement with the modern economy-size model. This made room for three families where one had lived before. We started this replacement program the week before the Calamity.

The first hint of trouble was a call from a checker to the front office. I happened to be there when he appeared on the vid-screen and said that one of our machines had built a Chinese pagoda. He seemed to think it was funny.

Then we began to receive other reports. Our machines were building grape arbors, covered bridges, cloisters, music halls, green houses, dancing pavilions and hunting lodges.

One machine was not building at all, but had gone on a rampage, clearing ground where we had just completed one thousand of the new economy-size dwelling units.

The machine was dynamited by our emergency squad.

5

My name is Fisher. On the first day of the Calamity, I was a member of an audience which had been employed by the Spectacle Commission to observe the start of the Forty-Ton-Shovel-Cross-Continent-Ditch-Digging Contest.

This was the first time that power shovels of this size had been used to dig a ditch more than a thousand miles long. I was very proud to be in that audience.

The contest started on time. The shovels were marshaled and on their marks at the city line. The Mayor fired a disarmed war rocket as the signal to start.

And then the shovels, instead of biting into the dirt, turned at right angles and began to chew a path through the paid audience.

This was not called for in the contract and many hired spectators ran away in fright, but a few of us had enough professional pride to stand by. We watched as the shovels cut an irregular path through streets, parks and open lots in the city snapping at everything in their way until they reached the water-front.

I thought they would stop at the docks. The leaders *did* pause, until all the shovels had come abreast. Then, as if they had a common impulse, they rolled into the harbor and sank in unison.

As I later said to my wife, it was quite extraordinary.

6

My name is Danville. I was watching a colorvision program on the first day of the Calamity.

The program was a wrestling match between a woman and a bear. The bear was winning when the screen went dark. The announcer's voice faded and I heard what sounded like the chatter of my neighbors. When the screen lit up again, it

showed my own home. The door opened to reveal the hallway to the dining room, where I could see my wife sewing a patch on my son's pants. Then I saw my daughter experimenting on fudge in the food laboratory and my boy working on a bomb model. What surprised me most was a picture of myself staring at myself on the screen.

This wasn't very interesting to me, so I tried some of the other stations. No matter where I tuned in, though, I found myself looking at a part of my own home. I wrote a letter of complaint to the Universal Program Commission, but never even got an answer.

7

I am sorry that I do not remember my name. I have been employed a long time in the Classified Laboratory of Theoretical Physics and have been under security orders to speak to no one except in answer to official queries. As I am the only scholar in my field—the polarity of the positron—I have never been asked for information. If I had been, perhaps I would not have forgotten my name, but I cannot be sure. I don't know whether the replies are signed.

I could have prevented the Calamity. I tried. I risked my life in the attempt. But at the moment when it seemed I might succeed, something happened which I must try to explain.

First let me tell you why I knew what would happen.

My studies of minute particles led me to believe that machines might exert some form of choice. Simply because aggregates have always behaved predictably, I could not assume they always would. Even though the masses of men behaved as expected, I remember that, in my grandfather's time, individual persons frequently departed from established courses. What the individual could do, I felt the mass or the machine might do.

As you know, these were subversive views, running directly counter to the cult of the Statisticians, which was based entirely on the predictability of mass behavior.

The cult of the Statisticians was strong because it produced results. By employing Statisticians, the contending armies in the Peripheral Wars predicted each other's movements so accurately that they eliminated the possibility of surprise. Thus the Statisticians produced the military impasse which destroyed the prestige of political leadership. From that time on, Statisticians filled the posts of government.

The success of the Statisticians proved their undoing. They claimed that they could create a perfect system without conflict or accident. They fondly believed that with the feedback in the electron brain, they could anticipate and correct all deviations in behavior, human or mechanical.

They might have succeeded, if not for a fundamental error.

I discovered this error as soon as the plans for the fiscal century were published. The design of the electron brain had completely ignored the polarity of the positron. In the total fiscal complex, this factor permits any aggregate to choose its own course. But the error was not immediately obvious to the Statisticians. It remained subtle and concealed until multiplied beyond control.

Naturally, I prepared a report to predict to my chiefs the dangers embedded in this plan for a perfect world. I predicted that the machines would make their own decisions, even though most men long ago had lost that power. I even warned them that the ancient concept of "free will," now forbidden, would return to destroy them. These were the facts I offered.

The report was never delivered.

I'd hardly put my seal on the document when the automatic security guard closed in. The document was seized and I was bound gagged and thrown onto a conveyor belt. I saw myself on the way to the eraser. Only the polarity of the positron saved me. Desperately, on my way out of the laboratory, I kicked a single switch.

Instead of taking me to my punishment, the conveyor belt converted itself into a joy ride. The gag fell out. My bonds dissolved. The Calamity had begun.

The joy ride carried me to witness many of the events reported to this Commission. And then it tossed me directly into the center of the office of the Chiefs. I had one more opportunity to tell my story, to save the system.

Given a second choice, I reconsidered.

Had a perfect system been to my taste, I'd have died cheerfully to save it. But the Calamity excited me. I relished its surprises and adventures, even its hazards. I remember the old peasant proverb, "When life is perfect, it is time to die." And I decided I'd rather live.

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: At this point, the Commission abruptly closed its hearings. The unnamed physicist was charged with treason and ordered executed on the spot. His life was saved, however, by Rioters representing the New Disorder, which, upon seizing power, decreed that the Calamity should henceforth be called the Blessing.

The physicist was rewarded by being made head of the government. He served two distinguished terms as President Nameless, which was the origin of the Presidential title of address, "Your Namelessness."

The Commission, of course, was sent to Erasure.

—MARK MEADOWS

LIGHTER THAN YOU THINK

It's possible that you won't agree with us that Pat Pending's latest adventure is a delightful story—possible IF you haven't been used to laughing in recent years. Blue Book printed more than a dozen of these stories by Nelson Bond about the "greatest inventulator of all time".

Sandy's eyes needed only jet propulsion to become flying saucers. Wasn't Pat wonderful? she beamed, at everyone.

Some joker in the dear, dead days now virtually beyond recall won two-bit immortality by declaring that, "What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar."

Which is, of course, Victorian malarkey. What this country really needs is a good five-cent nickel. Or perhaps a good cigar-shaped spaceship. There's a fortune waiting somewhere out in space for the man who can go out there and claim it. A fortune! And if you think I'm just talking through my hat, lend an ear ...

Joyce started the whole thing. Or maybe I did when for the umpteenth time I suggested she should marry me. She smiled in a way that showed she didn't disapprove of my persistence, but loosed a salvo of devastating negatives.

"No deal," she crisped decisively. "Know why? No dough!"

"But, sugar," I pleaded, "two can live as cheaply as one—"

"This is true," replied Joyce, "only of guppies. Understand, Don, I don't mind changing my name from Carter to Mallory. In fact, I'd rather like to. But I have no desire whatever to be known to the neighbors as 'that poor little Mrs. Mallory in last year's coat.'

"I'll marry you," she continued firmly, "when, as and if you get a promotion."

Her answer was by no stretch of the imagination a reason for loud cheers, handsprings and cartwheels. Because I'm a Federal employee. The United States Patent Office is my beat. There's one nice thing to be said about working for the bewhiskered old gentleman in the star-spangled stovepipe and striped britches:

it's permanent. Once you get your name inscribed on the list of Civil Service employees it takes an act of Congress to blast it off again. And of course I don't have to remind you how long it takes that body of vote-happy windbags to act. Terrapins in treacle are greased lightning by comparison.

But advancement is painfully slow in a department where discharges are unheard of and resignations rare. When I started clerking for this madhouse I was assistant to the assistant Chief Clerk's assistant. Now, ten years later, by dint of mighty effort and a cultivated facility for avoiding Senatorial investigations, I've succeeded in losing only one of those redundant adjectives.

Being my secretary, Joyce certainly realized this. But women have a remarkable ability to separate business and pleasure. So:

"A promotion," she insisted. "Or at least a good, substantial raise."

"In case you don't know it," I told her gloomily, "you are displaying a lamentably vulgar interest in one of life's lesser values. Happiness, not money, should be man's chief goal."

"What good is happiness," demanded Joyce, "if you can't buy money with it?"

"Why hoard lucre?" I sniffed. "You can't take it with you."

"In that case," said Joyce flatly, "I'm not going. There's no use arguing, Don. I've made up my mind—"

At this moment our dreary little impasse was ended by a sudden tumult outside my office. There was a squealing shriek, the shuffle of footsteps, the pounding of fists upon my door. And over all the shrill tones of an old, familiar voice high-pitched in triumph.

"Let me in! I've got to see him instantaceously. This time I've got it; I've absolutely got it!"

Joyce and I gasped, then broke simultaneously for the door as it flew open to reveal a tableau resembling the Laocoon group sans snake and party of the third part. Back to the door and struggling valiantly to defend it stood the receptionist, Miss Thomas. Held briefly but volubly at bay was a red-thatched, buck-toothed individual—and I do mean individual!—with a face like the map of Eire, who stopped wrestling as he saw us, and grinned delightedly.

"Hello, Mr. Mallory," he said. "Hi, Miss Joyce."

"Pat!" we both cried at once. "Pat Pending!"

Miss Thomas, a relative newcomer to our bailiwick, seemed baffled by the warmth of our greeting. She entered the office with our visitor, and as Joyce and I pumphandled him enthusiastically she asked, "You—you know this gentleman, Mr. Mallory?"

"I should say we do!" I chortled. "Pat, you old naughty word! Where on

earth have you been hiding lately?''

''Surely you've heard of the great Patrick Pending, Miss Thomas?'' asked Joyce.

''Pending?'' faltered Miss Thomas. ''I seem to have heard the name. Or seen it somewhere—''

Pat beamed upon her companionably. Stepping to my desk, he up-ended the typewriter and pointed to a legend in tiny letters stamped into the frame: Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.—Pat. Pending.

''Here, perhaps?'' he suggested. ''I invented this. And the airplane, and the automobile, and—oh, ever so many things. You'll find my name inscribed on every one.

''I,'' he announced modestly, ''am Pat Pending—the greatest inventulator of all time.''

Miss Thomas stared at me goggle-eyed.

''Is he?'' she demanded. ''I mean—did he?''

I nodded solemnly.

''Not only those, but a host of other marvels. The bacular clock, the transmatter, the predictograph—''

Miss Thomas turned on Pat a gaze of fawning admiration. ''How wonderful!'' she breathed.

''Oh, nothing, really,'' said Pat, wriggling.

''But it is! Most of the things brought here are so absurd. Automatic hat-tippers, self-defrosting galoshes, punching bags that defend themselves—'' Disdainfully she indicated the display collection of screwball items we call our Chamber of Horrors. ''It's simply marvelous to meet a man who has invented things really worth while.''

Honestly, the look in her eyes was sickening. But was Pat nauseated? Not he! The big goon was lapping it up like a famished feline. His simpering smirk stretched from ear to there as he murmured, ''Now, Miss Thomas—''

''Sandra, Mr. Pending,'' she sighed softly. ''To you just plain ... Sandy. Please?''

''Well, Sandy—'' Pat gulped.

I said disgustedly, ''Look, you two—break it up! Love at first sight is wonderful in books, but in a Federal office I'm pretty sure it's unconstitutional, and it may be subversive. Would you mind coming down to earth? Pat, you barged in here squalling about some new invention. Is that correct?''

With an effort Pat wrenched his gaze from his new-found admirer and nodded soberly.

''That's right, Mr. Mallory. And a great one, too. One that will revolutionate

the world. Will you give me an applicaceous form, please? I want to file it immediately."

"Not so fast, Pat. You know the routine. What's the nature of this remarkable discovery?"

"You may write it down," said Pat grandiloquently, "as Pat Pending's lightening rod."

I glanced at Joyce, and she at me, then both of us at Pending.

"But, Pat," I exclaimed, "that's ridiculous! Ben Franklin invented the lightning rod two hundred years ago."

"I said lightening," retorted my redheaded friend, "not lightning. My invention doesn't conduct electricity to the ground, but from it." He brandished a slim baton which until then I had assumed to be an ordinary walking-stick. "With this," he claimed, "I can make things weigh as much or as little as I please!"

The eyes of Sandy Thomas needed only jet propulsion to become flying saucers.

"Isn't he wonderful, Mr. Mallory?" she gasped.

But her enthusiasm wasn't contagious. I glowered at Pending coldly.

"Oh, come now, Pat!" I scoffed. "You can't really believe that yourself. After all, there are such things as basic principles. Weight is not a variable factor. And so far as I know, Congress hasn't repealed the Law of Gravity."

Pat sighed regretfully.

"You're always so hard to convince, Mr. Mallory," he complained. "But—oh, well! Take this."

He handed me the baton. I stared at it curiously. It looked rather like a British swagger stick: slim, dainty, well balanced. But the ornamental gadget at its top was not commonplace. It seemed to be a knob or a dial of some kind, divided into segments scored with vernier markings. I gazed at Pending askance.

"Well, Pat? What now?"

"How much do you weigh, Mr. Mallory?"

"One sixty-five," I answered.

"You're sure of that?"

"I'm not. But my bathroom scales appeared to be. This morning. Why?"

"Do you think Miss Joyce could lift you?"

I said thoughtfully, "Well, that's an idea. But I doubt it. She won't even let me try to support her."

"I'm serious, Mr. Mallory. Do you think she could lift you with one hand?"

"Don't be silly! Of course not. Nor could you."

"There's where you're wrong," said Pending firmly. "She can—and will."

He reached forward suddenly and twisted the metal cap on the stick in my hands. As he did so, I loosed a cry of alarm and almost dropped the baton. For instantaneously I experienced a startling, flighty giddiness, a sudden loss of weight that made me feel as if my soles were treading on sponge rubber, my shoulders sprouting wings.

"Hold on to it!" cried Pat. Then to Joyce, "Lift him, Miss Joyce."

Joyce faltered, "How? Like th-this?" and touched a finger to my midriff. Immediately my feet left the floor. I started flailing futilely to trample six inches of ozone back to the solid floorboards. To no avail. With no effort whatever Joyce raised me high above her head until my dazed dome was shedding dandruff on the ceiling!

"Well, Mr. Mallory," said Pat, "do you believe me now?"

"Get me down out of here!" I howled. "You know I can't stand high places!"

"You now weigh less than ten pounds—"

"Never mind the statistics. I feel like a circus balloon. How do I get down again?"

"Turn the knob on the cane," advised Pat, "to your normal weight. Careful, now! Not so fast!"

His warning came too late. I hit the deck with a resounding thud, and the cane came clattering after. Pat retrieved it hurriedly, inspected it to make sure it was not damaged. I glared at him as I picked myself off the floor.

"You might show some interest in me," I grumbled. "I doubt if that stick will need a liniment rubdown tonight. Okay, Pat. You're right and I'm wrong, as you usually are. That modern variation of a witch's broomstick does operate. Only—how?"

"That dial at the top governs weight," explained Pat. "When you turn it—"

"Skip that. I know how it is operated. I want to know what makes it work?"

"Well," explained Pat, "I'm not certain I can make it clear, but it's all tied in with the elemental scientific problems of mass, weight, gravity and electric energy. What is electricity, for example—"

"I used to know," I frowned. "But I forget."

Joyce shook her head sorrowfully.

"Friends," she intoned, "let us all bow our heads. This is a moment of great tragedy. The only man in the world who ever knew what electricity is—and he has forgotten!"

"That's the whole point," agreed Pending. "No one knows what electricity really is. All we know is how to use it. Einstein has demonstrated that the force of gravity and electrical energy are kindred; perhaps different aspects of a common phenomenon. That was my starting point."

"So this rod, which enables you to defy the law of gravity, is electrical?"

"Electricaceous," corrected Pat. "You see, I have transmogrified the polarifity of certain ingredular cellulations. A series of disentrigulated helicosities, activated by hypermagnetation, set up a disruptular wave motion which results in—counter-gravity!"

And there you are! Ninety-nine percent of the time Pat Pending talks like a normal human being. But ask him to explain the mechanism of one of his inventions and linguistic hell breaks loose. He begins jabbering like a schizophrenic parrot reading a Sanskrit dictionary backward! I sighed and surrendered all hope of ever actually learning how his great new discovery worked. I turned my thoughts to more important matters.

"Okay, Pat. We'll dismiss the details as trivial and get down to brass tacks. What is your invention used for?"

"Eh?" said the redhead.

"It's not enough that an idea is practicable," I pointed out. "It must also be practical to be of any value in this frenzied modern era. What good is your invention?"

"What good," demanded Joyce, "is a newborn baby?"

"Don't change the subject," I suggested. "Or come to think of it, maybe you should. At the diaper level, life is just one damp thing after another. But how to turn Pat's brainchild into cold, hard cash—that's the question before the board now.

"Individual flight a la Superman? No dice. I can testify from personal experience that once you get up there you're completely out of control. And I can't see any sense in humans trying to fly with jet flames scorching their base of operations.

"Elevators? Derricks? Building cranes? Possible. But lifting a couple hundred pounds is one thing. Lifting a few tons is a horse of a different color.

"No, Pat," I continued, "I don't see just how—"

Sandy Thomas squeaked suddenly and grasped my arm.

"That's it, Mr. Mallory!" she cried. "That's it!"

"Huh? What's what?"

"You wanted to know how Pat could make money from his invention. You've just answered your own question."

"I have?"

"Horses! Horse racing, to be exact. You've heard of handicaps, haven't you?"

"I'm overwhelmed with them," I nodded wearily. "A secretary who repulses my honorable advances, a receptionist who squeals in my ear—"

"Listen, Mr. Mallory, what's the last thing horses do before they go to the

post?"

"Check the tote board," I said promptly, "to find out if I've got any money on them. Horses hate me. They've formed an equine conspiracy to prove to me the ancient adage that a fool and his money are soon parted."

"Wait a minute!" chimed in Joyce thoughtfully. "I know what Sandy means. They weigh in. Is that right?"

"Exactly! The more weight a horse is bearing, the slower it runs. That's the purpose of handicapping. But if a horse that was supposed to be carrying more than a hundred pounds was actually only carrying ten—Well, you see?"

Sandy paused, breathless. I stared at her with a gathering respect.

"Never underestimate the power of a woman," I said, "when it comes to devising new and ingenious methods of perpetrating petty larceny. There's only one small fly in the ointment, so far as I can see. How do we convince some racehorse owner he should become a party to this gentle felony?"

"Oh, you don't have to," smiled Sandy cheerfully. "I'm already convinced."

"You? You own a horse?"

"Yes. Haven't you ever heard of Tapwater?"

"Oh, sure! That drip's running all the time!"

Joyce tossed me a reproving glance.

"This is a matter of gravity, Donald," she stated, "and you keep treating it with levity. Sandy, do you really own Tapwater? He's the colt who won the Monmouth Futurity, isn't he?"

"That's right. And four other starts this season. That's been our big trouble. He shows such promise that the judges have placed him under a terrific weight handicap. To run in next week's Gold Stakes, for instance, he would have to carry 124 pounds. I was hesitant to enter him because of that. But with Pat's new invention—" She turned to Pat, eyes glowing—"he could enter and win!"

Pat said uncertainly, "I don't know. I don't like gambling. And it doesn't seem quite ethical, somehow—"

I asked Sandy, "Suppose he ran carrying 124. What would be the probable odds?"

"High," she replied, "Very high. Perhaps as high as forty to one."

"In that case," I decided, "it's not only ethical, it's a moral obligation. If you're opposed to gambling, Pat, what better way can you think of to put the parimutuels out of business?"

"And besides," Sandy pointed out, "this would be a wonderful opportunity to display your new discovery before an audience of thousands. Well, Pat? What do you say?"

Pat hesitated, caught a glimpse of Sandy's pleading eyes, and was lost.

"Very well," he said. "We'll do it. Mr. Mallory, enter Tapwater in the Gold Stakes. We'll put on the most spectaceous exhibition in the history of gambilizing!"

Thus it was that approximately one week later our piratical little crew was assembled once again, this time in the paddock at Laurel. In case you're an inland aborigine, let me explain that Laurel race track (from the township of the same name) is where horse fanciers from the District of Columbia go to abandon their Capitol and capital on weekends.

We were briefing our jockey—a scrawny youth with a pair of oversized ears—on the use of Pat's lightening rod. Being short on gray matter as well as on stature, he wasn't getting it at all.

"You mean," he said for the third or thirty-third time, "you don't want I should hit the nag with this bat?"

"Heavens, no!" gasped Pat, blanching. "It's much too delicate for that."

"Don't fool yourself, mister. Horses can stand a lot of leather."

"Not the horse, stupid," I said. "The bat. This is the only riding crop of its kind in the world. We don't want it damaged. All you have to do is carry it. We'll do the rest."

"How about setting the dial, Don?" asked Joyce.

"Pat will do that just before the horses move onto the track. Now let's get going. It's weigh-in time."

We moved to the scales with our rider. He stepped aboard the platform, complete with silks and saddle, and the spinner leaped to a staggering 102, whereupon the officials started gravely handing him little leather sacks.

"What's this?" I whispered to Sandy. "Prizes for malnutrition? He must have won all the blackjacks east of the Mississippi."

"The handicap," she whispered back. "Lead weights at one pound each."

"If he starts to lose," I ruminated, "they'd make wonderful ammunition—"

"One hundred and twenty-four," announced the chief weigher-inner. "Next entry!"

We returned to Tapwater. The jockey fastened the weights to his gear, saddled up and mounted. From the track came the traditional bugle call. Sandy nodded to Pat.

"All right, Pat. Now!"

Pending twisted the knob on his lightening rod and handed the stick to the jockey. The little horseman gasped, rose three inches in his stirrups, and almost let go of the baton.

"H-hey!" he exclaimed. "I feel funny. I feel—"

"Never mind that," I told him. "Just you hold on to that rod until the race is over. And when you come back, give it to Pat immediately. Understand?"

"Yes. But I feel so—so lightheaded—"

"That's because you're featherbrained," I advised him. "Now, get going. Giddyap, Dobbin!"

I patted Tapwater's flank, and so help me Newton, I think that one gentle tap pushed the colt half way to the starting gate! He pattered across the turf with a curious bouncing gait as if he were running on tiptoe. We hastened to our seats in the grandstand.

"Did you get all the bets down?" asked Joyce.

I nodded and displayed a deck of ducats. "It may not have occurred to you, my sweet," I announced gleefully, "but these pasteboards are transferrable on demand to rice and old shoes, the sweet strains of Oh, Promise Me! and the scent of orange blossoms. You insisted I should have a nest egg before you would murmur, 'I do'? Well, after this race these tickets will be worth—" I cast a swift last glance at the tote board's closing odds, quoting Tapwater at 35 to 1—"approximately seventy thousand dollars!"

"Donald!" gasped Joyce. "You didn't bet all your savings?"

"Every cent," I told her cheerfully. "Why not?"

"But if something should go wrong! If Tapwater should lose!"

"He won't. See what I mean?"

For even as we were talking, the bell jangled, the crowd roared, and the horses were off. Eight entries surged from the starting gate. And already one full length out in front pranced the weight-free, lightfoot Tapwater!

At the quarter post our colt had stretched his lead to three lengths, and I shouted in Pending's ear, "How much does that jockey weigh, anyway?"

"About six pounds," said Pat. "I turned the knob to cancel one eighteen."

At the half, all the other horses could glimpse of Tapwater was heels. At the three-quarter post he was so far ahead that the jockey must have been lonely. As he rounded into the stretch I caught a binocular view of his face, and he looked dazed and a little frightened. He wasn't actually riding Tapwater. The colt was simply skimming home, and he was holding on for dear life to make sure he didn't blow off the horse's back. The result was a foregone conclusion, of course. Tapwater crossed the finish line nine lengths ahead, setting a new track record.

The crowd went wild. Over the hubbub I clutched Pat's arm and bawled, "I'll go collect our winnings. Hurry down to the track and swap that lightening rod for the real bat we brought along. He'll have to weigh out again, you know. Scoot!"

The others vanished paddockward as I went for the big payoff. It was dreary at the totalizer windows. I was one of a scant handful who had bet on Tapwater, so it took no time at all to scoop into the valise I had brought along the seventy thousand bucks in crisp, green lettuce which an awed teller passed across the counter.

Then I hurried back to join the others in the winner's circle, where bedlam was not only reigning but pouring. Flashbulbs were popping all over the place, cameramen were screaming for just one more of the jockey, the owner, the fabulous Tapwater. The officials were vainly striving to quiet the tumult so they could award the prize. I found Pending worming his way out of the heart of the crowd.

"Did you get it?" I demanded.

He nodded, thrust the knobbed baton into my hand.

"You substituted the normal one?"

Again he nodded. Hastily I thrust the lightening rod out of sight into my valise, and we elbowed forward to share the triumphant moment. It was a great experience. I felt giddy with joy; I was walking on little pink clouds of happiness. Security was mine at last. And Joyce, as well.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" cried the chief official. "Your attention, please! Today we have witnessed a truly spectacular feat: the setting of a new track record by a champion racing under a tremendous handicap. I give you a magnificent racehorse—Tapwater!"

"That's right, folks!" I bawled, carried away by the excitement. "Give this little horse a great big hand!"

Setting the example, I laid down the bag, started clapping vigorously. From a distance I heard Pat Pending's agonized scream.

"Mr. Mallory—the suitcase! Grab it!"

I glanced down, belatedly aware of the danger of theft. But too late. The bag had disappeared.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Who swiped my bag? Police!"

"Up there, Mr. Mallory!" bawled Pat. "Jump!"

I glanced skyward. Three feet above my head and rising swiftly was the valise in which I had cached not only our winnings but Pat's gravity-defying rod! I leaped—but in vain. I was still making feeble, futile efforts to make like the moon-hurdling nursery rhyme cow when quite a while later two strong young men in white jackets came and jabbed me with a sedative ...

Later, when time and barbiturates had dulled the biting edge of my despair, we assembled once again in my office and I made my apologies to my friends.

"It was all my fault," I acknowledged. "I should have realized Pat hadn't readjusted the rod when I placed it in my bag. It felt lighter. But I was so excited.."

"It was my fault," mourned Pat, "for not changing it immediately. But I was afraid someone might see me."

"Perhaps if we hired an airplane—?" I suggested.

Pat shook his head.

"No, Mr. Mallory. The rod was set to cancel 118 pounds. The bag weighed less than twenty. It will go miles beyond the reach of any airplane before it settles into an orbit around earth."

"Well, there goes my dreamed-of fortune," I said sadly. "Accompanied by the fading strains of an unplayed wedding march. I'm sorry, Joyce."

"Isn't there one thing you folks are overlooking?" asked Sandy Thomas. "My goodness, you'd think we had lost our last cent just because that little old bag flew away!"

"For your information," I told her, "that is precisely what happened to me. My entire bank account vanished into the wild blue yonder. And some of Pat's money, too."

"But have you forgotten," she insisted, "that we won the race? Of course the track officials were a wee bit suspicious when your suitcase took off. But they couldn't prove anything. So they paid me the Gold Stakes prize. If we split it four ways, we all make a nice little profit.

"Or," she added, "if you and Joyce want to make yours a double share, we could split it three ways.

"Or," she continued hopefully, "if Pat wants to, we could make two double shares, and split it fifty-fifty?"

From the look in Pat's eyes I knew he was stunned by this possibility. And from the look in hers, I felt she was going to make every effort to take advantage of his bewilderment.

So, as I said before, what this country needs is a good cigar-shaped spaceship. There's a fortune waiting somewhere out in space for the man who can go out there and claim it. Seventy thousand bucks in cold, hard cash.

Indubitatiously!

LOST IN THE FUTURE

Did you ever wonder what might happen if mankind ever exceeded the speed of light? Here is a profound story based on that thought—a story which may well forecast one of the problems to be encountered in space travel.

They had discovered a new planet—but its people did not see them until after they had traveled on.

Albrecht and I went down in a shuttleship, leaving the stellatomic orbited pole-to-pole two thousand miles above Alpha Centauri's second planet. While we took an atmosphere-brushing approach which wouldn't burn off the shuttle's skin, we went as swiftly as we could.

A week before we had completed man's first trip through hyperspace. We were now making the first landing on an inhabited planet of another sun. All the preliminary investigations had been made via electronspectroscopes and electrontelescopes from the stellatomic.

We knew that the atmosphere was breathable and were reasonably certain that the peoples of the world into whose atmosphere we were dropping were at peace. We went unarmed, just the two of us; it might not be wise to go in force.

We were silent, and I know that Harry Albrecht was as perplexed as I was over the fact that our all-wave receivers failed to pick up any signs of radio communication whatever. We had assumed that we would pick up signals of some type as soon as we had passed down through the unfamiliar planet's ionosphere.

The scattered arrangement of the towering cities appeared to call for radio communications. The hundreds of atmosphere ships flashing along a system of airways between the cities seemed to indicate the existence of electronic navigational and landing aids. But perhaps the signals were all tightly beamed; we would know when we came lower.

We dropped down into the airway levels, and still our receivers failed to pick up a signal of any sort—not even a whisper of static. And strangely, our radarscopes failed to record even a blip from their atmosphere ships!

"I guess it's our equipment, Harry," I said. "It just doesn't seem to function in this atmosphere. We'll have to put Edwards to work on it when we go back upstairs."

We spotted an airport on the outskirts of a large city. The runways were laid out with the precision of Earth's finest. I put our ship's nose eastward on a runway and took it down fast through a lull in the atmosphere ship traffic.

As we went down I saw tiny buildings spotted on the field which surely housed electronic equipment, but our receivers remained silent.

I taxied the shuttle up to an unloading ramp before the airport's terminal building and I killed the drive.

"Harry," I said, "if it weren't that their ships are so outlandishly stubby and their buildings so outflung, we might well be on Earth!"

"I agree, Captain. Strange, though, that they're not mobbing us. They couldn't take this delta-winged job for one of their ships!"

It was strange.

I looked up at the observation ramp's occupants—people who except for their bizarre dress might well be of Earth—and saw no curiosity in the eyes that sometimes swept across our position.

"Be that as it may, Harry, we certainly should cause a stir in these pressure suits. Let's go!"

We walked up to a dour-looking individual at a counter at the ramp's end. Clearing my throat, I said rather inanely, "Hello!"—but what does one say to an extrasolarian?

I realized then that my voice seemed thunderous, that the only other sounds came from a distance: the city's noise, the atmosphere ships' engines on the horizon.

The Centaurian ignored us.

I looked at the atmosphere ships in the clear blue sky, at the Centaurians on the ramp who appeared to be conversing—and there was no sound from those planes, no sound from the people!

"It's impossible," Harry said. "The atmosphere's nearly Earth-normal. It should be—well, damn it, it is as sound-conductive; we're talking, aren't we?"

I looked up at the Centaurians again. They were looking excitedly westward. Some turned to companions. Mouths opened and closed to form words we could not hear. Wide eyes lowered, following something I could not see. Sick inside, I turned to Albrecht and read confirmation in his drawn, blanched face.

"Captain," he said, "I suspected that we might find something like this when we first came out of hyperspace and the big sleep. The recorders showed we'd exceeded light-speed in normal space-time just after the transition. Einstein theo-

rized that time would not pass as swiftly to those approaching light-speed. We could safely exceed that speed in hyperspace but should never have done so in normal space-time. Beyond light-speed time must conversely accelerate!

"These people haven't seen us yet. They certainly just observed our landing. As we suspected, they probably do have speech and radio—but we can't pick up either. We're seconds ahead of them in time and we can't pick up from the past sounds of nearby origin or nearby signals radiated at light-speed. They'll see and hear us soon, but we'll never receive an answer from them! Our questions will come to them in their future but we can never pick answers from their past!"

"Let's go, Harry," I said quickly.

"Where?" he asked. "Where can we ever go that will be an improvement over this?" He was resigned.

"Back into space," I said. "Back to circle this system at a near-light-speed. The computers should be able to determine how long and how slow we'll have to fly to cancel this out. If not, we are truly and forever lost!"

MR. SPACESHIP

A human brain-controlled spacecraft would mean mechanical perfection. This was accomplished, and something unforeseen: a strange entity called—MR. SPACE-SHIP.

Kramer leaned back. "You can see the situation. How can we deal with a factor like this? The perfect variable."

"Perfect? Prediction should still be possible. A living thing still acts from necessity, the same as inanimate material. But the cause-effect chain is more subtle; there are more factors to be considered. The difference is quantitative, I think. The reaction of the living organism parallels natural causation, but with greater complexity."

Gross and Kramer looked up at the board plates, suspended on the wall, still dripping, the images hardening into place. Kramer traced a line with his pencil.

"See that? It's a pseudopodium. They're alive, and so far, a weapon we can't beat. No mechanical system can compete with that, simple or intricate. We'll have to scrap the Johnson Control and find something else."

"Meanwhile the war continues as it is. Stalemate. Checkmate. They can't get to us, and we can't get through their living minefield."

Kramer nodded. "It's a perfect defense, for them. But there still might be one answer."

"What's that?"

"Wait a minute." Kramer turned to his rocket expert, sitting with the charts and files. "The heavy cruiser that returned this week. It didn't actually touch, did it? It came close but there was no contact."

"Correct." The expert nodded. "The mine was twenty miles off. The cruiser was in space-drive, moving directly toward Proxima, line-straight, using the Johnson Control, of course. It had deflected a quarter of an hour earlier for reasons unknown. Later it resumed its course. That was when they got it."

"It shifted," Kramer said. "But not enough. The mine was coming along after it, trailing it. It's the same old story, but I wonder about the contact."

"Here's our theory," the expert said. "We keep looking for contact, a trigger in the pseudopodium. But more likely we're witnessing a psychological phenomena, a decision without any physical correlative. We're watching for something that isn't there. The mine decides to blow up. It sees our ship, approaches, and then decides."

"Thanks." Kramer turned to Gross. "Well, that confirms what I'm saying. How can a ship guided by automatic relays escape a mine that decides to explode? The whole theory of mine penetration is that you must avoid tripping the trigger. But here the trigger is a state of mind in a complicated, developed life-form."

"The belt is fifty thousand miles deep," Gross added. "It solves another problem for them, repair and maintenance. The damn things reproduce, fill up the spaces by spawning into them. I wonder what they feed on?"

"Probably the remains of our first-line. The big cruisers must be a delicacy. It's a game of wits, between a living creature and a ship piloted by automatic relays. The ship always loses." Kramer opened a folder. "I'll tell you what I suggest."

"Go on," Gross said. "I've already heard ten solutions today. What's yours?"

"Mine is very simple. These creatures are superior to any mechanical system, but only because they're alive. Almost any other life-form could compete with them, any higher life-form. If the yuks can put out living mines to protect their planets, we ought to be able to harness some of our own life-forms in a similar way. Let's make use of the same weapon ourselves."

"Which life-form do you propose to use?"

"I think the human brain is the most agile of known living forms. Do you know of any better?"

"But no human being can withstand outspace travel. A human pilot would be dead of heart failure long before the ship got anywhere near Proxima."

"But we don't need the whole body," Kramer said. "We need only the brain."

"What?"

"The problem is to find a person of high intelligence who would contribute, in the same manner that eyes and arms are volunteered."

"But a brain...."

"Technically, it could be done. Brains have been transferred several times, when body destruction made it necessary. Of course, to a spaceship, to a heavy outspace cruiser, instead of an artificial body, that's new."

The room was silent.

"It's quite an idea," Gross said slowly. His heavy square face twisted. "But even supposing it might work, the big question is whose brain?"

It was all very confusing, the reasons for the war, the nature of the enemy. The Yucconae had been contacted on one of the outlying planets of Proxima Centauri. At the approach of the Terran ship, a host of dark slim pencils had lifted abruptly and shot off into the distance. The first real encounter came between three of the yuk pencils and a single exploration ship from Terra. No Terrans survived. After that it was all out war, with no holds barred.

Both sides feverishly constructed defense rings around their systems. Of the two, the Yucconae belt was the better. The ring around Proxima was a living ring, superior to anything Terra could throw against it. The standard equipment by which Terran ships were guided in outspace, the Johnson Control, was not adequate. Something more was needed. Automatic relays were not good enough.

—Not good at all, Kramer thought to himself, as he stood looking down the hillside at the work going on below him. A warm wind blew along the hill, rustling the weeds and grass. At the bottom, in the valley, the mechanics had almost finished; the last elements of the reflex system had been removed from the ship and crated up.

All that was needed now was the new core, the new central key that would take the place of the mechanical system. A human brain, the brain of an intelligent, wary human being. But would the human being part with it? That was the problem.

Kramer turned. Two people were approaching him along the road, a man and a woman. The man was Gross, expressionless, heavy-set, walking with dignity. The woman was—He stared in surprise and growing annoyance. It was Dolores, his wife. Since they'd separated he had seen little of her....

"Kramer," Gross said. "Look who I ran into. Come back down with us. We're going into town."

"Hello, Phil," Dolores said. "Well, aren't you glad to see me?"

He nodded. "How have you been? You're looking fine." She was still pretty and slender in her uniform, the blue-grey of Internal Security, Gross' organization.

"Thanks." She smiled. "You seem to be doing all right, too. Commander Gross tells me that you're responsible for this project, Operation Head, as they call it. Whose head have you decided on?"

"That's the problem." Kramer lit a cigarette. "This ship is to be equipped with a human brain instead of the Johnson system. We've constructed special draining baths for the brain, electronic relays to catch the impulses and magnify them, a continual feeding duct that supplies the living cells with everything they need. But—"

"But we still haven't got the brain itself," Gross finished. They began to walk back toward the car. "If we can get that we'll be ready for the tests."

"Will the brain remain alive?" Dolores asked. "Is it actually going to live as part of the ship?"

"It will be alive, but not conscious. Very little life is actually conscious. Animals, trees, insects are quick in their responses, but they aren't conscious. In this process of ours the individual personality, the ego, will cease. We only need the response ability, nothing more."

Dolores shuddered. "How terrible!"

"In time of war everything must be tried," Kramer said absently. "If one life sacrificed will end the war it's worth it. This ship might get through. A couple more like it and there wouldn't be any more war."

They got into the car. As they drove down the road, Gross said, "Have you thought of anyone yet?"

Kramer shook his head. "That's out of my line."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm an engineer. It's not in my department."

"But all this was your idea."

"My work ends there."

Gross was staring at him oddly. Kramer shifted uneasily.

"Then who is supposed to do it?" Gross said. "I can have my organization prepare examinations of various kinds, to determine fitness, that kind of thing—"

"Listen, Phil," Dolores said suddenly.

"What?"

She turned toward him. "I have an idea. Do you remember that professor we had in college. Michael Thomas?"

Kramer nodded.

"I wonder if he's still alive." Dolores frowned. "If he is he must be awfully old."

"Why, Dolores?" Gross asked.

"Perhaps an old person who didn't have much time left, but whose mind was still clear and sharp—"

"Professor Thomas." Kramer rubbed his jaw. "He certainly was a wise old duck. But could he still be alive? He must have been seventy, then."

"We could find that out," Gross said. "I could make a routine check."

"What do you think?" Dolores said. "If any human mind could outwit those creatures—"

"I don't like the idea," Kramer said. In his mind an image had appeared, the

image of an old man sitting behind a desk, his bright gentle eyes moving about the classroom. The old man leaning forward, a thin hand raised—

"Keep him out of this," Kramer said.

"What's wrong?" Gross looked at him curiously.

"It's because I suggested it," Dolores said.

"No." Kramer shook his head. "It's not that. I didn't expect anything like this, somebody I knew, a man I studied under. I remember him very clearly. He was a very distinct personality."

"Good," Gross said. "He sounds fine."

"We can't do it. We're asking his death!"

"This is war," Gross said, "and war doesn't wait on the needs of the individual. You said that yourself. Surely he'll volunteer; we can keep it on that basis."

"He may already be dead," Dolores murmured.

"We'll find that out," Gross said speeding up the car. They drove the rest of the way in silence.

For a long time the two of them stood studying the small wood house, overgrown with ivy, set back on the lot behind an enormous oak. The little town was silent and sleepy; once in awhile a car moved slowly along the distant highway, but that was all.

"This is the place," Gross said to Kramer. He folded his arms. "Quite a quaint little house."

Kramer said nothing. The two Security Agents behind them were expressionless.

Gross started toward the gate. "Let's go. According to the check he's still alive, but very sick. His mind is agile, however. That seems to be certain. It's said he doesn't leave the house. A woman takes care of his needs. He's very frail."

They went down the stone walk and up onto the porch. Gross rang the bell. They waited. After a time they heard slow footsteps. The door opened. An elderly woman in a shapeless wrapper studied them impassively.

"Security," Gross said, showing his card. "We wish to see Professor Thomas."

"Why?"

"Government business." He glanced at Kramer.

Kramer stepped forward. "I was a pupil of the Professor's," he said. "I'm sure he won't mind seeing us."

The woman hesitated uncertainly. Gross stepped into the doorway. "All right, mother. This is war time. We can't stand out here."

The two Security agents followed him, and Kramer came reluctantly be-

hind, closing the door. Gross stalked down the hall until he came to an open door. He stopped, looking in. Kramer could see the white corner of a bed, a wooden post and the edge of a dresser.

He joined Gross.

In the dark room a withered old man lay, propped up on endless pillows. At first it seemed as if he were asleep; there was no motion or sign of life. But after a time Kramer saw with a faint shock that the old man was watching them intently, his eyes fixed on them, unmoving, unwinking.

"Professor Thomas?" Gross said. "I'm Commander Gross of Security. This man with me is perhaps known to you—"

The faded eyes fixed on Kramer.

"I know him. Philip Kramer.... You've grown heavier, boy." The voice was feeble, the rustle of dry ashes. "Is it true you're married now?"

"Yes. I married Dolores French. You remember her." Kramer came toward the bed. "But we're separated. It didn't work out very well. Our careers—"

"What we came here about, Professor," Gross began, but Kramer cut him off with an impatient wave.

"Let me talk. Can't you and your men get out of here long enough to let me talk to him?"

Gross swallowed. "All right, Kramer." He nodded to the two men. The three of them left the room, going out into the hall and closing the door after them.

The old man in the bed watched Kramer silently. "I don't think much of him," he said at last. "I've seen his type before. What's he want?"

"Nothing. He just came along. Can I sit down?" Kramer found a stiff upright chair beside the bed. "If I'm bothering you—"

"No. I'm glad to see you again, Philip. After so long. I'm sorry your marriage didn't work out."

"How have you been?"

"I've been very ill. I'm afraid that my moment on the world's stage has almost ended." The ancient eyes studied the younger man reflectively. "You look as if you have been doing well. Like everyone else I thought highly of. You've gone to the top in this society."

Kramer smiled. Then he became serious. "Professor, there's a project we're working on that I want to talk to you about. It's the first ray of hope we've had in this whole war. If it works, we may be able to crack the yuk defenses, get some ships into their system. If we can do that the war might be brought to an end."

"Go on. Tell me about it, if you wish."

"It's a long shot, this project. It may not work at all, but we have to give it a try."

"It's obvious that you came here because of it," Professor Thomas murmured. "I'm becoming curious. Go on."

After Kramer finished the old man lay back in the bed without speaking. At last he sighed.

"I understand. A human mind, taken out of a human body." He sat up a little, looking at Kramer. "I suppose you're thinking of me."

Kramer said nothing.

"Before I make my decision I want to see the papers on this, the theory and outline of construction. I'm not sure I like it.—For reasons of my own, I mean. But I want to look at the material. If you'll do that—"

"Certainly." Kramer stood up and went to the door. Gross and the two Security Agents were standing outside, waiting tensely. "Gross, come inside."

They filed into the room.

"Give the Professor the papers," Kramer said. "He wants to study them before deciding."

Gross brought the file out of his coat pocket, a manila envelope. He handed it to the old man on the bed. "Here it is, Professor. You're welcome to examine it. Will you give us your answer as soon as possible? We're very anxious to begin, of course."

"I'll give you my answer when I've decided." He took the envelope with a thin, trembling hand. "My decision depends on what I find out from these papers. If I don't like what I find, then I will not become involved with this work in any shape or form." He opened the envelope with shaking hands. "I'm looking for one thing."

"What is it?" Gross said.

"That's my affair. Leave me a number by which I can reach you when I've decided."

Silently, Gross put his card down on the dresser. As they went out Professor Thomas was already reading the first of the papers, the outline of the theory.

Kramer sat across from Dale Winter, his second in line. "What then?" Winter said.

"He's going to contact us." Kramer scratched with a drawing pen on some paper. "I don't know what to think."

"What do you mean?" Winter's good-natured face was puzzled.

"Look." Kramer stood up, pacing back and forth, his hands in his uniform pockets. "He was my teacher in college. I respected him as a man, as well as a teacher. He was more than a voice, a talking book. He was a person, a calm, kindly person I could look up to. I always wanted to be like him, someday. Now look at me."

"So?"

"Look at what I'm asking. I'm asking for his life, as if he were some kind of laboratory animal kept around in a cage, not a man, a teacher at all."

"Do you think he'll do it?"

"I don't know." Kramer went to the window. He stood looking out. "In a way, I hope not."

"But if he doesn't—"

"Then we'll have to find somebody else. I know. There would be somebody else. Why did Dolores have to—"

The vidphone rang. Kramer pressed the button.

"This is Gross." The heavy features formed. "The old man called me. Professor Thomas."

"What did he say?" He knew; he could tell already, by the sound of Gross' voice.

"He said he'd do it. I was a little surprised myself, but apparently he means it. We've already made arrangements for his admission to the hospital. His lawyer is drawing up the statement of liability."

Kramer only half heard. He nodded wearily. "All right. I'm glad. I suppose we can go ahead, then."

"You don't sound very glad."

"I wonder why he decided to go ahead with it."

"He was very certain about it." Gross sounded pleased. "He called me quite early. I was still in bed. You know, this calls for a celebration."

"Sure," Kramer said. "It sure does."

Toward the middle of August the project neared completion. They stood outside in the hot autumn heat, looking up at the sleek metal sides of the ship.

Gross thumped the metal with his hand. "Well, it won't be long. We can begin the test any time."

"Tell us more about this," an officer in gold braid said. "It's such an unusual concept."

"Is there really a human brain inside the ship?" a dignitary asked, a small man in a rumpled suit. "And the brain is actually alive?"

"Gentlemen, this ship is guided by a living brain instead of the usual Johnson relay-control system. But the brain is not conscious. It will function by reflex only. The practical difference between it and the Johnson system is this: a human brain is far more intricate than any man-made structure, and its ability to adapt itself to a situation, to respond to danger, is far beyond anything that could be artificially built."

Gross paused, cocking his ear. The turbines of the ship were beginning to rumble, shaking the ground under them with a deep vibration. Kramer was standing a short distance away from the others, his arms folded, watching silently. At the sound of the turbines he walked quickly around the ship to the other side. A few workmen were clearing away the last of the waste, the scraps of wiring and scaffolding. They glanced up at him and went on hurriedly with their work. Kramer mounted the ramp and entered the control cabin of the ship. Winter was sitting at the controls with a Pilot from Space-transport.

"How's it look?" Kramer asked.

"All right." Winter got up. "He tells me that it would be best to take off manually. The robot controls—" Winter hesitated. "I mean, the built-in controls, can take over later on in space."

"That's right," the Pilot said. "It's customary with the Johnson system, and so in this case we should—"

"Can you tell anything yet?" Kramer asked.

"No," the Pilot said slowly. "I don't think so. I've been going over everything. It seems to be in good order. There's only one thing I wanted to ask you about." He put his hand on the control board. "There are some changes here I don't understand."

"Changes?"

"Alterations from the original design. I wonder what the purpose is."

Kramer took a set of the plans from his coat. "Let me look." He turned the pages over. The Pilot watched carefully over his shoulder.

"The changes aren't indicated on your copy," the Pilot said. "I wonder—" He stopped. Commander Gross had entered the control cabin.

"Gross, who authorized alterations?" Kramer said. "Some of the wiring has been changed."

"Why, your old friend." Gross signaled to the field tower through the window.

"My old friend?"

"The Professor. He took quite an active interest." Gross turned to the Pilot. "Let's get going. We have to take this out past gravity for the test they tell me. Well, perhaps it's for the best. Are you ready?"

"Sure." The Pilot sat down and moved some of the controls around. "Anytime."

"Go ahead, then," Gross said.

"The Professor—" Kramer began, but at that moment there was a tremendous roar and the ship leaped under him. He grasped one of the wall holds and hung on as best he could. The cabin was filling with a steady throbbing, the rag-

ing of the jet turbines underneath them.

The ship leaped. Kramer closed his eyes and held his breath. They were moving out into space, gaining speed each moment.

"Well, what do you think?" Winter said nervously. "Is it time yet?"

"A little longer," Kramer said. He was sitting on the floor of the cabin, down by the control wiring. He had removed the metal covering-plate, exposing the complicated maze of relay wiring. He was studying it, comparing it to the wiring diagrams.

"What's the matter?" Gross said.

"These changes. I can't figure out what they're for. The only pattern I can make out is that for some reason—"

"Let me look," the Pilot said. He squatted down beside Kramer. "You were saying?"

"See this lead here? Originally it was switch controlled. It closed and opened automatically, according to temperature change. Now it's wired so that the central control system operates it. The same with the others. A lot of this was still mechanical, worked by pressure, temperature, stress. Now it's under the central master."

"The brain?" Gross said. "You mean it's been altered so that the brain manipulates it?"

Kramer nodded. "Maybe Professor Thomas felt that no mechanical relays could be trusted. Maybe he thought that things would be happening too fast. But some of these could close in a split second. The brake rockets could go on as quickly as—"

"Hey," Winter said from the control seat. "We're getting near the moon stations. What'll I do?"

They looked out the port. The corroded surface of the moon gleamed up at them, a corrupt and sickening sight. They were moving swift toward it.

"I'll take it," the Pilot said. He eased Winter out of the way and strapped himself in place. The ship began to move away from the moon as he manipulated the controls. Down below them they could see the observation stations dotting the surface, and the tiny squares that were the openings of the underground factories and hangars. A red blinker winked up at them and the Pilot's fingers moved on the board in answer.

"We're past the moon," the Pilot said, after a time. The moon had fallen behind them; the ship was heading into outer space. "Well, we can go ahead with it."

Kramer did not answer.

"Mr. Kramer, we can go ahead any time."

Kramer started. "Sorry. I was thinking. All right, thanks." He frowned, deep in thought.

"What is it?" Gross asked.

"The wiring changes. Did you understand the reason for them when you gave the okay to the workmen?"

Gross flushed. "You know I know nothing about technical material. I'm in Security."

"Then you should have consulted me."

"What does it matter?" Gross grinned wryly. "We're going to have to start putting our faith in the old man sooner or later."

The Pilot stepped back from the board. His face was pale and set. "Well, it's done," he said. "That's it."

"What's done?" Kramer said.

"We're on automatic. The brain. I turned the board over to it—to him, I mean. The Old Man." The Pilot lit a cigarette and puffed nervously. "Let's keep our fingers crossed."

The ship was coasting evenly, in the hands of its invisible pilot. Far down inside the ship, carefully armoured and protected, a soft human brain lay in a tank of liquid, a thousand minute electric charges playing over its surface. As the charges rose they were picked up and amplified, fed into relay systems, advanced, carried on through the entire ship—

Gross wiped his forehead nervously. "So he is running it, now. I hope he knows what he's doing."

Kramer nodded enigmatically. "I think he does."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing." Kramer walked to the port. "I see we're still moving in a straight line." He picked up the microphone. "We can instruct the brain orally, through this." He blew against the microphone experimentally.

"Go on," Winter said.

"Bring the ship around half-right," Kramer said. "Decrease speed."

They waited. Time passed. Gross looked at Kramer. "No change. Nothing."

"Wait."

Slowly, the ship was beginning to turn. The turbines missed, reducing their steady beat. The ship was taking up its new course, adjusting itself. Nearby some space debris rushed past, incinerating in the blasts of the turbine jets.

"So far so good," Gross said.

They began to breathe more easily. The invisible pilot had taken control smoothly, calmly. The ship was in good hands. Kramer spoke a few more words

into the microphone, and they swung again. Now they were moving back the way they had come, toward the moon.

"Let's see what he does when we enter the moon's pull," Kramer said. "He was a good mathematician, the old man. He could handle any kind of problem."

The ship veered, turning away from the moon. The great eaten-away globe fell behind them.

Gross breathed a sigh of relief. "That's that."

"One more thing." Kramer picked up the microphone. "Return to the moon and land the ship at the first space field," he said into it.

"Good Lord," Winter murmured. "Why are you—"

"Be quiet." Kramer stood, listening. The turbines gasped and roared as the ship swung full around, gaining speed. They were moving back, back toward the moon again. The ship dipped down, heading toward the great globe below.

"We're going a little fast," the Pilot said. "I don't see how he can put down at this velocity."

The port filled up, as the globe swelled rapidly. The Pilot hurried toward the board, reaching for the controls. All at once the ship jerked. The nose lifted and the ship shot out into space, away from the moon, turning at an oblique angle. The men were thrown to the floor by the sudden change in course. They got to their feet again, speechless, staring at each other.

The Pilot gazed down at the board. "It wasn't me! I didn't touch a thing. I didn't even get to it."

The ship was gaining speed each moment. Kramer hesitated. "Maybe you better switch it back to manual."

The Pilot closed the switch. He took hold of the steering controls and moved them experimentally. "Nothing." He turned around. "Nothing. It doesn't respond."

No one spoke.

"You can see what has happened," Kramer said calmly. "The old man won't let go of it, now that he has it. I was afraid of this when I saw the wiring changes. Everything in this ship is centrally controlled, even the cooling system, the hatches, the garbage release. We're helpless."

"Nonsense." Gross strode to the board. He took hold of the wheel and turned it. The ship continued on its course, moving away from the moon, leaving it behind.

"Release!" Kramer said into the microphone. "Let go of the controls! We'll take it back. Release."

"No good," the Pilot said. "Nothing." He spun the useless wheel. "It's dead, completely dead."

"And we're still heading out," Winter said, grinning foolishly. "We'll be going

through the first-line defense belt in a few minutes. If they don't shoot us down—"

"We better radio back." The Pilot clicked the radio to send. "I'll contact the main bases, one of the observation stations."

"Better get the defense belt, at the speed we're going. We'll be into it in a minute."

"And after that," Kramer said, "we'll be in outer space. He's moving us toward outspace velocity. Is this ship equipped with baths?"

"Baths?" Gross said.

"The sleep tanks. For space-drive. We may need them if we go much faster."

"But good God, where are we going?" Gross said. "Where—where's he taking us?"

The Pilot obtained contact. "This is Dwight, on ship," he said. "We're entering the defense zone at high velocity. Don't fire on us."

"Turn back," the impersonal voice came through the speaker. "You're not allowed in the defense zone."

"We can't. We've lost control."

"Lost control?"

"This is an experimental ship."

Gross took the radio. "This is Commander Gross, Security. We're being carried into outer space. There's nothing we can do. Is there any way that we can be removed from this ship?"

A hesitation. "We have some fast pursuit ships that could pick you up if you wanted to jump. The chances are good they'd find you. Do you have space flares?"

"We do," the Pilot said. "Let's try it."

"Abandon ship?" Kramer said. "If we leave now we'll never see it again."

"What else can we do? We're gaining speed all the time. Do you propose that we stay here?"

"No." Kramer shook his head. "Damn it, there ought to be a better solution."

"Could you contact him?" Winter asked. "The Old Man? Try to reason with him?"

"It's worth a chance," Gross said. "Try it."

"All right." Kramer took the microphone. He paused a moment. "Listen! Can you hear me? This is Phil Kramer. Can you hear me, Professor. Can you hear me? I want you to release the controls."

There was silence.

"This is Kramer, Professor. Can you hear me? Do you remember who I am? Do you understand who this is?"

Above the control panel the wall speaker made a sound, a sputtering static. They looked up.

"Can you hear me, Professor. This is Philip Kramer. I want you to give the ship back to us. If you can hear me, release the controls! Let go, Professor. Let go!"

Static. A rushing sound, like the wind. They gazed at each other. There was silence for a moment.

"It's a waste of time," Gross said.

"No—listen!"

The sputter came again. Then, mixed with the sputter, almost lost in it, a voice came, toneless, without inflection, a mechanical, lifeless voice from the metal speaker in the wall, above their heads.

"... Is it you, Philip? I can't make you out. Darkness.... Who's there? With you...."

"It's me, Kramer." His fingers tightened against the microphone handle. "You must release the controls, Professor. We have to get back to Terra. You must."

Silence. Then the faint, faltering voice came again, a little stronger than before. "Kramer. Everything so strange. I was right, though. Consciousness result of thinking. Necessary result. Cognito ergo sum. Retain conceptual ability. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, Professor—"

"I altered the wiring. Control. I was fairly certain.... I wonder if I can do it. Try...."

Suddenly the air-conditioning snapped into operation. It snapped abruptly off again. Down the corridor a door slammed. Something thudded. The men stood listening. Sounds came from all sides of them, switches shutting, opening. The lights blinked off; they were in darkness. The lights came back on, and at the same time the heating coils dimmed and faded.

"Good God!" Winter said.

Water poured down on them, the emergency fire-fighting system. There was a screaming rush of air. One of the escape hatches had slid back, and the air was roaring frantically out into space.

The hatch banged closed. The ship subsided into silence. The heating coils glowed into life. As suddenly as it had begun the weird exhibition ceased.

"I can do—everything," the dry, toneless voice came from the wall speaker. "It is all controlled. Kramer, I wish to talk to you. I've been—been thinking. I haven't seen you in many years. A lot to discuss. You've changed, boy. We have much to discuss. Your wife—"

The Pilot grabbed Kramer's arm. "There's a ship standing off our bow. Look."

They ran to the port. A slender pale craft was moving along with them, keeping pace with them. It was signal-blinking.

"A Terran pursuit ship," the Pilot said. "Let's jump. They'll pick us up. Suits.."

He ran to a supply cupboard and turned the handle. The door opened and he pulled the suits out onto the floor.

"Hurry," Gross said. A panic seized them. They dressed frantically, pulling the heavy garments over them. Winter staggered to the escape hatch and stood by it, waiting for the others. They joined him, one by one.

"Let's go!" Gross said. "Open the hatch."

Winter tugged at the hatch. "Help me."

They grabbed hold, tugging together. Nothing happened. The hatch refused to budge.

"Get a crowbar," the Pilot said.

"Hasn't anyone got a blaster?" Gross looked frantically around. "Damn it, blast it open!"

"Pull," Kramer grated. "Pull together."

"Are you at the hatch?" the toneless voice came, drifting and eddying through the corridors of the ship. They looked up, staring around them. "I sense something nearby, outside. A ship? You are leaving, all of you? Kramer, you are leaving, too? Very unfortunate. I had hoped we could talk. Perhaps at some other time you might be induced to remain."

"Open the hatch!" Kramer said, staring up at the impersonal walls of the ship. "For God's sake, open it!"

There was silence, an endless pause. Then, very slowly, the hatch slid back. The air screamed out, rushing past them into space.

One by one they leaped, one after the other, propelled away by the repulsive material of the suits. A few minutes later they were being hauled aboard the pursuit ship. As the last one of them was lifted through the port, their own ship pointed itself suddenly upward and shot off at tremendous speed. It disappeared.

Kramer removed his helmet, gasping. Two sailors held onto him and began to wrap him in blankets. Gross sipped a mug of coffee, shivering.

"It's gone," Kramer murmured.

"I'll have an alarm sent out," Gross said.

"What's happened to your ship?" a sailor asked curiously. "It sure took off in a hurry. Who's on it?"

"We'll have to have it destroyed," Gross went on, his face grim. "It's got to be destroyed. There's no telling what it—what he has in mind." Gross sat down weakly on a metal bench. "What a close call for us. We were so damn trusting."

"What could he be planning," Kramer said, half to himself. "It doesn't make sense. I don't get it."

As the ship sped back toward the moon base they sat around the table in the dining room, sipping hot coffee and thinking, not saying very much.

"Look here," Gross said at last. "What kind of man was Professor Thomas? What do you remember about him?"

Kramer put his coffee mug down. "It was ten years ago. I don't remember much. It's vague."

He let his mind run back over the years. He and Dolores had been at Hunt College together, in physics and the life sciences. The College was small and set back away from the momentum of modern life. He had gone there because it was his home town, and his father had gone there before him.

Professor Thomas had been at the College a long time, as long as anyone could remember. He was a strange old man, keeping to himself most of the time. There were many things that he disapproved of, but he seldom said what they were.

"Do you recall anything that might help us?" Gross asked. "Anything that would give us a clue as to what he might have in mind?"

Kramer nodded slowly. "I remember one thing...."

One day he and the Professor had been sitting together in the school chapel, talking leisurely.

"Well, you'll be out of school, soon," the Professor had said. "What are you going to do?"

"Do? Work at one of the Government Research Projects, I suppose."

"And eventually? What's your ultimate goal?"

Kramer had smiled. "The question is unscientific. It presupposes such things as ultimate ends."

"Suppose instead along these lines, then: What if there were no war and no Government Research Projects? What would you do, then?"

"I don't know. But how can I imagine a hypothetical situation like that? There's been war as long as I can remember. We're geared for war. I don't know what I'd do. I suppose I'd adjust, get used to it."

The Professor had stared at him. "Oh, you do think you'd get accustomed to it, eh? Well, I'm glad of that. And you think you could find something to do?"

Gross listened intently. "What do you infer from this, Kramer?"

"Not much. Except that he was against war."

"We're all against war," Gross pointed out.

"True. But he was withdrawn, set apart. He lived very simply, cooking his

own meals. His wife died many years ago. He was born in Europe, in Italy. He changed his name when he came to the United States. He used to read Dante and Milton. He even had a Bible.''

''Very anachronistic, don't you think?''

''Yes, he lived quite a lot in the past. He found an old phonograph and records, and he listened to the old music. You saw his house, how old-fashioned it was.''

''Did he have a file?'' Winter asked Gross.

''With Security? No, none at all. As far as we could tell he never engaged in political work, never joined anything or even seemed to have strong political convictions.''

''No,'' Kramer, agreed. ''About all he ever did was walk through the hills. He liked nature.''

''Nature can be of great use to a scientist,'' Gross said. ''There wouldn't be any science without it.''

''Kramer, what do you think his plan is, taking control of the ship and disappearing?'' Winter said.

''Maybe the transfer made him insane,'' the Pilot said. ''Maybe there's no plan, nothing rational at all.''

''But he had the ship rewired, and he had made sure that he would retain consciousness and memory before he even agreed to the operation. He must have had something planned from the start. But what?''

''Perhaps he just wanted to stay alive longer,'' Kramer said. ''He was old and about to die. Or—''

''Or what?''

''Nothing.'' Kramer stood up. ''I think as soon as we get to the moon base I'll make a vidcall to earth. I want to talk to somebody about this.''

''Who's that?'' Gross asked.

''Dolores. Maybe she remembers something.''

''That's a good idea,'' Gross said.

''Where are you calling from?'' Dolores asked, when he succeeded in reaching her.

''From the moon base.''

''All kinds of rumors are running around. Why didn't the ship come back? What happened?''

''I'm afraid he ran off with it.''

''He?''

''The Old Man. Professor Thomas.'' Kramer explained what had happened.

Dolores listened intently. "How strange. And you think he planned it all in advance, from the start?"

"I'm certain. He asked for the plans of construction and the theoretical diagrams at once."

"But why? What for?"

"I don't know. Look, Dolores. What do you remember about him? Is there anything that might give a clue to all this?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. That's the trouble."

On the vidscreen Dolores knitted her brow. "I remember he raised chickens in his back yard, and once he had a goat." She smiled. "Do you remember the day the goat got loose and wandered down the main street of town? Nobody could figure out where it came from."

"Anything else?"

"No." He watched her struggling, trying to remember. "He wanted to have a farm, sometime, I know."

"All right. Thanks." Kramer touched the switch. "When I get back to Terra maybe I'll stop and see you."

"Let me know how it works out."

He cut the line and the picture dimmed and faded. He walked slowly back to where Gross and some officers of the Military were sitting at a chart table, talking.

"Any luck?" Gross said, looking up.

"No. All she remembers is that he kept a goat."

"Come over and look at this detail chart." Gross motioned him around to his side. "Watch!"

Kramer saw the record tabs moving furiously, the little white dots racing back and forth.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"A squadron outside the defense zone has finally managed to contact the ship. They're maneuvering now, for position. Watch."

The white counters were forming a barrel formation around a black dot that was moving steadily across the board, away from the central position. As they watched, the white dots constricted around it.

"They're ready to open fire," a technician at the board said. "Commander, what shall we tell them to do?"

Gross hesitated. "I hate to be the one who makes the decision. When it comes right down to it—"

"It's not just a ship," Kramer said. "It's a man, a living person. A human being is up there, moving through space. I wish we knew what—"

"But the order has to be given. We can't take any chances. Suppose he went over to them, to the yuks."

Kramer's jaw dropped. "My God, he wouldn't do that."

"Are you sure? Do you know what he'll do?"

"He wouldn't do that."

Gross turned to the technician. "Tell them to go ahead."

"I'm sorry, sir, but now the ship has gotten away. Look down at the board."

Gross stared down, Kramer over his shoulder. The black dot had slipped through the white dots and had moved off at an abrupt angle. The white dots were broken up, dispersing in confusion.

"He's an unusual strategist," one of the officers said. He traced the line. "It's an ancient maneuver, an old Prussian device, but it worked."

The white dots were turning back. "Too many yuk ships out that far," Gross said. "Well, that's what you get when you don't act quickly." He looked up coldly at Kramer. "We should have done it when we had him. Look at him go!" He jabbed a finger at the rapidly moving black dot. The dot came to the edge of the board and stopped. It had reached the limit of the chartered area. "See?"

—Now what? Kramer thought, watching. So the Old Man had escaped the cruisers and gotten away. He was alert, all right; there was nothing wrong with his mind. Or with ability to control his new body.

Body—The ship was a new body for him. He had traded in the old dying body, withered and frail, for this hulking frame of metal and plastic, turbines and rocket jets. He was strong, now. Strong and big. The new body was more powerful than a thousand human bodies. But how long would it last him? The average life of a cruiser was only ten years. With careful handling he might get twenty out of it, before some essential part failed and there was no way to replace it.

And then, what then? What would he do, when something failed and there was no one to fix it for him? That would be the end. Someplace, far out in the cold darkness of space, the ship would slow down, silent and lifeless, to exhaust its last heat into the eternal timelessness of outer space. Or perhaps it would crash on some barren asteroid, burst into a million fragments.

It was only a question of time.

"Your wife didn't remember anything?" Gross said.

"I told you. Only that he kept a goat, once."

"A hell of a lot of help that is."

Kramer shrugged. "It's not my fault."

"I wonder if we'll ever see him again." Gross stared down at the indicator

dot, still hanging at the edge of the board. "I wonder if he'll ever move back this way."

"I wonder, too," Kramer said.

That night Kramer lay in bed, tossing from side to side, unable to sleep. The moon gravity, even artificially increased, was unfamiliar to him and it made him uncomfortable. A thousand thoughts wandered loose in his head as he lay, fully awake.

What did it all mean? What was the Professor's plan? Maybe they would never know. Maybe the ship was gone for good; the Old Man had left forever, shooting into outer space. They might never find out why he had done it, what purpose—if any—had been in his mind.

Kramer sat up in bed. He turned on the light and lit a cigarette. His quarters were small, a metal-lined bunk room, part of the moon station base.

The Old Man had wanted to talk to him. He had wanted to discuss things, hold a conversation, but in the hysteria and confusion all they had been able to think of was getting away. The ship was rushing off with them, carrying them into outer space. Kramer set his jaw. Could they be blamed for jumping? They had no idea where they were being taken, or why. They were helpless, caught in their own ship, and the pursuit ship standing by waiting to pick them up was their only chance. Another half hour and it would have been too late.

But what had the Old Man wanted to say? What had he intended to tell him, in those first confusing moments when the ship around them had come alive, each metal strut and wire suddenly animate, the body of a living creature, a vast metal organism?

It was weird, unnerving. He could not forget it, even now. He looked around the small room uneasily. What did it signify, the coming to life of metal and plastic? All at once they had found themselves inside a living creature, in its stomach, like Jonah inside the whale.

It had been alive, and it had talked to them, talked calmly and rationally, as it rushed them off, faster and faster into outer space. The wall speaker and circuit had become the vocal cords and mouth, the wiring the spinal cord and nerves, the hatches and relays and circuit breakers the muscles.

They had been helpless, completely helpless. The ship had, in a brief second, stolen their power away from them and left them defenseless, practically at its mercy. It was not right; it made him uneasy. All his life he had controlled machines, bent nature and the forces of nature to man and man's needs. The human race had slowly evolved until it was in a position to operate things, run them as it saw fit. Now all at once it had been plunged back down the ladder again, prostrate before a Power against which they were children.

Kramer got out of bed. He put on his bathrobe and began to search for a

cigarette. While he was searching, the vidphone rang.

He snapped the vidphone on.

"Yes?"

The face of the immediate monitor appeared. "A call from Terra, Mr. Kramer. An emergency call."

"Emergency call? For me? Put it through." Kramer came awake, brushing his hair back out of his eyes. Alarm plucked at him.

From the speaker a strange voice came. "Philip Kramer? Is this Kramer?"

"Yes. Go on."

"This is General Hospital, New York City, Terra. Mr. Kramer, your wife is here. She has been critically injured in an accident. Your name was given to us to call. Is it possible for you to—"

"How badly?" Kramer gripped the vidphone stand. "Is it serious?"

"Yes, it's serious, Mr. Kramer. Are you able to come here? The quicker you can come the better."

"Yes." Kramer nodded. "I'll come. Thanks."

The screen died as the connection was broken. Kramer waited a moment. Then he tapped the button. The screen relit again. "Yes, sir," the monitor said.

"Can I get a ship to Terra at once? It's an emergency. My wife—"

"There's no ship leaving the moon for eight hours. You'll have to wait until the next period."

"Isn't there anything I can do?"

"We can broadcast a general request to all ships passing through this area. Sometimes cruisers pass by here returning to Terra for repairs."

"Will you broadcast that for me? I'll come down to the field."

"Yes sir. But there may be no ship in the area for awhile. It's a gamble." The screen died.

Kramer dressed quickly. He put on his coat and hurried to the lift. A moment later he was running across the general receiving lobby, past the rows of vacant desks and conference tables. At the door the sentries stepped aside and he went outside, onto the great concrete steps.

The face of the moon was in shadow. Below him the field stretched out in total darkness, a black void, endless, without form. He made his way carefully down the steps and along the ramp along the side of the field, to the control tower. A faint row of red lights showed him the way.

Two soldiers challenged him at the foot of the tower, standing in the shadows, their guns ready.

"Kramer?"

"Yes." A light was flashed in his face.

"Your call has been sent out already."

"Any luck?" Kramer asked.

"There's a cruiser nearby that has made contact with us. It has an injured jet and is moving slowly back toward Terra, away from the line."

"Good." Kramer nodded, a flood of relief rushing through him. He lit a cigarette and gave one to each of the soldiers. The soldiers lit up.

"Sir," one of them asked, "is it true about the experimental ship?"

"What do you mean?"

"It came to life and ran off?"

"No, not exactly," Kramer said. "It had a new type of control system instead of the Johnson units. It wasn't properly tested."

"But sir, one of the cruisers that was there got up close to it, and a buddy of mine says this ship acted funny. He never saw anything like it. It was like when he was fishing once on Terra, in Washington State, fishing for bass. The fish were smart, going this way and that—"

"Here's your cruiser," the other soldier said. "Look!"

An enormous vague shape was setting slowly down onto the field. They could make nothing out but its row of tiny green blinkers. Kramer stared at the shape.

"Better hurry, sir," the soldiers said. "They don't stick around here very long."

"Thanks." Kramer loped across the field, toward the black shape that rose up above him, extended across the width of the field. The ramp was down from the side of the cruiser and he caught hold of it. The ramp rose, and a moment later Kramer was inside the hold of the ship. The hatch slid shut behind him.

As he made his way up the stairs to the main deck the turbines roared up from the moon, out into space.

Kramer opened the door to the main deck. He stopped suddenly, staring around him in surprise. There was nobody in sight. The ship was deserted.

"Good God," he said. Realization swept over him, numbing him. He sat down on a bench, his head swimming. "Good God."

The ship roared out into space leaving the moon and Terra farther behind each moment.

And there was nothing he could do.

"So it was you who put the call through," he said at last. "It was you who called me on the vidphone, not any hospital on Terra. It was all part of the plan." He looked up and around him. "And Dolores is really—"

"Your wife is fine," the wall speaker above him said tonelessly. "It was a fraud. I am sorry to trick you that way, Philip, but it was all I could think of. Another day and you would have been back on Terra. I don't want to remain in this area any longer than necessary. They have been so certain of finding me out in deep space that I have been able to stay here without too much danger. But even the purloined letter was found eventually."

Kramer smoked his cigarette nervously. "What are you going to do? Where are we going?"

"First, I want to talk to you. I have many things to discuss. I was very disappointed when you left me, along with the others. I had hoped that you would remain." The dry voice chuckled. "Remember how we used to talk in the old days, you and I? That was a long time ago."

The ship was gaining speed. It plunged through space at tremendous speed, rushing through the last of the defense zone and out beyond. A rush of nausea made Kramer bend over for a moment.

When he straightened up the voice from the wall went on, "I'm sorry to step it up so quickly, but we are still in danger. Another few moments and we'll be free."

"How about yuk ships? Aren't they out here?"

"I've already slipped away from several of them. They're quite curious about me."

"Curious?"

"They sense that I'm different, more like their own organic mines. They don't like it. I believe they will begin to withdraw from this area, soon. Apparently they don't want to get involved with me. They're an odd race, Philip. I would have liked to study them closely, try to learn something about them. I'm of the opinion that they use no inert material. All their equipment and instruments are alive, in some form or other. They don't construct or build at all. The idea of making is foreign to them. They utilize existing forms. Even their ships—"

"Where are we going?" Kramer said. "I want to know where you are taking me."

"Frankly, I'm not certain."

"You're not certain?"

"I haven't worked some details out. There are a few vague spots in my program, still. But I think that in a short while I'll have them ironed out."

"What is your program?" Kramer said.

"It's really very simple. But don't you want to come into the control room and sit? The seats are much more comfortable than that metal bench."

Kramer went into the control room and sat down at the control board. Look-

ing at the useless apparatus made him feel strange.

"What's the matter?" the speaker above the board rasped.

Kramer gestured helplessly. "I'm—powerless. I can't do anything. And I don't like it. Do you blame me?"

"No. No, I don't blame you. But you'll get your control back, soon. Don't worry. This is only a temporary expedient, taking you off this way. It was something I didn't contemplate. I forgot that orders would be given out to shoot me on sight."

"It was Gross' idea."

"I don't doubt that. My conception, my plan, came to me as soon as you began to describe your project, that day at my house. I saw at once that you were wrong; you people have no understanding of the mind at all. I realized that the transfer of a human brain from an organic body to a complex artificial space ship would not involve the loss of the intellectualization faculty of the mind. When a man thinks, he is.

"When I realized that, I saw the possibility of an age-old dream becoming real. I was quite elderly when I first met you, Philip. Even then my life-span had come pretty much to its end. I could look ahead to nothing but death, and with it the extinction of all my ideas. I had made no mark on the world, none at all. My students, one by one, passed from me into the world, to take up jobs in the great Research Project, the search for better and bigger weapons of war.

"The world has been fighting for a long time, first with itself, then with the Martians, then with these beings from Proxima Centauri, whom we know nothing about. The human society has evolved war as a cultural institution, like the science of astronomy, or mathematics. War is a part of our lives, a career, a respected vocation. Bright, alert young men and women move into it, putting their shoulders to the wheel as they did in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. It has always been so.

"But is it innate in mankind? I don't think so. No social custom is innate. There were many human groups that did not go to war; the Eskimos never grasped the idea at all, and the American Indians never took to it well.

"But these dissenters were wiped out, and a cultural pattern was established that became the standard for the whole planet. Now it has become ingrained in us.

"But if someplace along the line some other way of settling problems had arisen and taken hold, something different than the massing of men and material to—"

"What's your plan?" Kramer said. "I know the theory. It was part of one of your lectures."

"Yes, buried in a lecture on plant selection, as I recall. When you came to

me with this proposition I realized that perhaps my conception could be brought to life, after all. If my theory were right that war is only a habit, not an instinct, a society built up apart from Terra with a minimum of cultural roots might develop differently. If it failed to absorb our outlook, if it could start out on another foot, it might not arrive at the same point to which we have come: a dead end, with nothing but greater and greater wars in sight, until nothing is left but ruin and destruction everywhere.

"Of course, there would have to be a Watcher to guide the experiment, at first. A crisis would undoubtedly come very quickly, probably in the second generation. Cain would arise almost at once.

"You see, Kramer, I estimate that if I remain at rest most of the time, on some small planet or moon, I may be able to keep functioning for almost a hundred years. That would be time enough, sufficient to see the direction of the new colony. After that—Well, after that it would be up to the colony itself.

"Which is just as well, of course. Man must take control eventually, on his own. One hundred years, and after that they will have control of their own destiny. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps war is more than a habit. Perhaps it is a law of the universe, that things can only survive as groups by group violence.

"But I'm going ahead and taking the chance that it is only a habit, that I'm right, that war is something we're so accustomed to that we don't realize it is a very unnatural thing. Now as to the place! I'm still a little vague about that. We must find the place, still.

"That's what we're doing now. You and I are going to inspect a few systems off the beaten path, planets where the trading prospects are low enough to keep Terran ships away. I know of one planet that might be a good place. It was reported by the Fairchild Expedition in their original manual. We may look into that, for a start."

The ship was silent.

Kramer sat for a time, staring down at the metal floor under him. The floor throbbed dully with the motion of the turbines. At last he looked up.

"You might be right. Maybe our outlook is only a habit." Kramer got to his feet. "But I wonder if something has occurred to you?"

"What is that?"

"If it's such a deeply ingrained habit, going back thousands of years, how are you going to get your colonists to make the break, leave Terra and Terran customs? How about this generation, the first ones, the people who found the colony? I think you're right that the next generation would be free of all this, if there were an—" He grinned. "—An Old Man Above to teach them something else instead."

Kramer looked up at the wall speaker. "How are you going to get the people

to leave Terra and come with you, if by your own theory, this generation can't be saved, it all has to start with the next?''

The wall speaker was silent. Then it made a sound, the faint dry chuckle.

''I'm surprised at you Philip. Settlers can be found. We won't need many, just a few.'' The speaker chuckled again. ''I'll acquaint you with my solution.''

At the far end of the corridor a door slid open. There was sound, a hesitant sound. Kramer turned.

''Dolores!''

Dolores Kramer stood uncertainly, looking into the control room. She blinked in amazement. ''Phil! What are you doing here? What's going on?''

They stared at each other.

''What's happening?'' Dolores said. ''I received a vidcall that you had been hurt in a lunar explosion—''

The wall speaker rasped into life. ''You see, Philip, that problem is already solved. We don't really need so many people; even a single couple might do.''

Kramer nodded slowly. ''I see,'' he murmured thickly. ''Just one couple. One man and woman.''

''They might make it all right, if there were someone to watch and see that things went as they should. There will be quite a few things I can help you with, Philip. Quite a few. We'll get along very well, I think.''

Kramer grinned wryly. ''You could even help us name the animals,'' he said. ''I understand that's the first step.''

''I'll be glad to,'' the toneless, impersonal voice said. ''As I recall, my part will be to bring them to you, one by one. Then you can do the actual naming.''

''I don't understand,'' Dolores faltered. ''What does he mean, Phil? Naming animals. What kind of animals? Where are we going?''

Kramer walked slowly over to the port and stood staring silently out, his arms folded. Beyond the ship a myriad fragments of light gleamed, countless coals glowing in the dark void. Stars, suns, systems. Endless, without number. A universe of worlds. An infinity of planets, waiting for them, gleaming and winking from the darkness.

He turned back, away from the port. ''Where are we going?'' He smiled at his wife, standing nervous and frightened, her large eyes full of alarm. ''I don't know where we are going,'' he said. ''But somehow that doesn't seem too important right now.... I'm beginning to see the Professor's point, it's the result that counts.''

And for the first time in many months he put his arm around Dolores. At first she stiffened, the fright and nervousness still in her eyes. But then suddenly she relaxed against him and there were tears wetting her cheeks.

"Phil ... do you really think we can start over again—you and I?"

He kissed her tenderly, then passionately.

And the spaceship shot swiftly through the endless, trackless eternity of the void....